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THE GREEN HILLS BY THE SEA

A *MAVX* STORY

by
HUGH COLEMAN DAVIDSON





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GREEN HILLS BY THE SEA

A MANX STORY

BY

HUGH COLEMAN DAVIDSON

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE GREEN HILLS BY THE SEA.

CHAPTER I.

FRIEND AND LOVER.

‘NED,’ said Major Christorey, standing stiffly on the lawn in front of his orderly shrubs as if he were on parade with his men behind him, ‘now that that crack-brained young Maddrell is out of the way, you will lose no time in doing what you ought to have done before.’

‘What is that?’ asked Ned, colouring. He knew well enough, but wished to have it put more definitely.

‘Marry Nessie, of course.’

‘You forget, sir, that I am Frank’s friend.’

‘And pray, what has friendship to do with it?’

‘I can’t quite explain my feelings,’ replied Ned, awkwardly, pegging at the lawn with his stick. ‘It seems just as if Nessie had lately lost her husband—my friend. Under such circumstances you wouldn’t have me propose to her, I’m sure.’

‘There spoke my own son Ned,’ said a gentle voice. And turning they beheld Mrs. Christorey with a shawl over her shoulders.

The major stared at her and then at Ned.

‘Another conspiracy!’ he exclaimed at length. ‘First, a conspiracy to marry Nessie, and now a conspiracy to leave her

in the lurch ! Well, I'll be shot if I can understand a woman—or a man, if Ned is one !'

'Ned is not seeking anything for himself, Reginald,' said Mrs. Christorey. 'On the other hand, he is giving up—for a time, at any rate—what he had earnestly set his heart upon. It can have cost him no ordinary pang to have come to this decision. I think it a noble decision, Ned, and feel very proud of my son.'

This put the matter in a new and softer light for the major. But, for all that, he did not relinquish his own idea. Turning to Ned, he asked, curtly :

'Where are you going now?'

'To Claddagh House.'

'Then go. And,' added he to his wife, when they were alone, 'nature will do the rest.'

Why, it may be asked, was he so bent

upon Ned's marrying Nessie when he had once appeared to be strongly opposed to an alliance with any of the Colquitts? There are some people, not a few, to whom opposition is much the same thing as a red rag to a bull—an invitation to proceed; the thicker the brick wall before them, the more resolutely do they bang their wooden heads against it. Major Christorey belonged to this class, his wife being the only person who could manage him. She had set his head in the direction of Ned's marriage with Nessie and he had been going in the same direction ever since, with all the more determination because of Frank's engagement. This obstacle being now removed, it had become very difficult to turn him.

This by itself would have been a sufficient reason for his attitude; but there was also another. His chivalrous instincts

had been aroused by the strong feeling which had set in against the Colquitts, and, like a true soldier, he had ranged himself on the side of the weak. Nobody knew who had originated this feeling or who augmented it, but the fact was undeniable. The Colquitts were generally regarded as having conspired together for a most mercenary and disgraceful act, and were shunned accordingly. Now, public opinion, unless properly directed, is not unlike a boy's slice of bread-and-jam prepared by himself; in other words, it consists of a maximum of trash with a minimum of healthy food. The present case was no exception. The Colquitts may have been blameworthy, but to condemn a whole family unheard was a gross injustice; and Nessie, at any rate, deserved the sincerest pity. However, if they had all been egregiously in the wrong, the major would

none the less have espoused their cause, simply because public opinion with its many tongues was against them. He had a very shrewd idea that Fabian Dalrymple, whom he detested, was at the bottom of it; and never lost an opportunity of making his own voice heard on the opposite side. Even if a marriage could not be arranged—an hypothesis he refused to entertain—he was determined to show his sympathy with the Colquitts.

This will explain why Major Christorey was so ready to bid his son go to Claddagh House.

When Ned arrived there, he saw Mr. Colquitt in the garden, and, leaving Toby outside, went after him. He had, as we have seen, already placed his purse at Frank's disposal; he now made the same offer to Nessie's father in nearly the same terms.

‘Have you come from your father?’ asked Mr. Colquitt, looking with surprise over the shrimping-net he held in his hand.

‘No,’ stammered Ned, the blood rushing to his face as it always did on the smallest provocation. He considered the answer one to be ashamed of on his father’s account rather than proud of on his own.

‘Strange!’ said Mr. Colquitt. ‘Then he has been before you, Ned, my good fellow. He has most kindly offered to be my banker until I can get hold of some money.’

‘Has he!’ exclaimed Ned, ashamed of himself now—that is to say, of his injustice to his father.

‘But hush!’ whispered Mr. Colquitt, laying a hand on Ned’s arm and looking round nervously. ‘Not a word to my wife on any account. Not a word to anybody,

remember, Ned. That was your father's wish and it's mine, too. You took me rather by surprise, you see; otherwise, I shouldn't have told you.'

'Oh, but I won't tell a soul.'

'Then run away, that's a good fellow. You'll find them all in the drawing-room. If my wife should see you here with me, she would guess in a moment what we were talking about. You don't know'—he positively began to shake in his shoes—'what an alarmingly sharp woman she is at finding out things.'

It had not been Ned's intention to visit the rest of the family, but a desire to see how Nessie was bearing her trouble and to find out, if possible, some way of helping her, proved too strong for him. He was admitted by Sheval, who showed him upstairs to the drawing-room; where Mona was making some wax flowers, Nessie read-

ing, and Mrs. Colquitt sitting with folded hands, discoursing on her husband's lamentable idleness and the miseries in store for his pauper wife and children.

'September,' she was saying just before Ned entered, 'is a most dreadful month. I always wonder where I shall be when the next comes round. In Malew churchyard probably. A walking funeral, no gloves or hatbands, no breakfast——'

'Suppose, mother dear,' interrupted Mona, 'you talk about weddings for a change.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Colquitt, complacently accepting the suggestion, 'there's a good deal to be said about weddings. In my opinion, they ought to be simplified like funerals.'

'You dear old ingenious beauty!' exclaimed Nessie, looking up with a smile.

It was at this moment that Ned entered,

stumbling over the door-mat as he came in. He had scarcely taken his seat when the door again opened : to admit Dalrymple, who immediately proceeded to make himself at home. Seeing in him a way out of her difficulties, Mrs. Colquitt greeted him most cordially. So did Mona, though for a different reason ; she thought he would sooner or later spur Ned forward to grasp the prize that was dangling before his eyes. Nessie received him merely as a friend. All this scheming was quite beyond her. Though she did force a smile occasionally, she was much too depressed to take her share in the conversation.

The parcel which Dalrymple had brought with him, turned out to be a portrait of Nessie painted by himself from memory. It was a rash thing to exhibit it before a rival ; the fact that he did so, will prove, better than anything else, how

low he rated Ned, whose kindly nature was unknown to him. When he had taken off the wrappings, set it on a chair in a favourable light, and posed himself by its side, he invited the party to inspect it.

With Mrs. Colquitt in the centre, they grouped themselves before it. She looked at it much as a parrot looks at a nut—first with one eye and then with the other. When by severe self-control she had given her critical powers time to form a trustworthy opinion, she went into raptures over it and sent to compel her husband to come in and do likewise. Mona was less effusive in praise of the picture; and Nessie said but little, probably because she considered herself involved in its production. Ned, however, was entirely silent. Noticing this, Dalrymple said, with an ill-disguised look of amusement:

‘And what do you think of it, Mr. Christorey?’

Here was Ned’s chance. ‘Yes, no doubt a very creditable performance. A little stiff here, perhaps, and rather out of proportion there. Don’t you think so yourself? The lights and shadows want management, and surely the eyes have a trifling squint. And the hands—are those the hands, by the way?’ Something of this sort might possibly have stuck to Dalrymple, notwithstanding his disdain for the critic. But Ned never let prejudice weigh with him; he was thoroughly and perhaps clumsily honest.

‘It’s a very pretty picture,’ he said, looking at it closely, ‘but it’s not Nessie at all.’

Mrs. Colquitt threw up her hands in horror, but there was a mischievous light in Mona’s eyes.

‘Indeed,’ remarked Dalrymple, frigidly.

‘Not at all.’

‘You paint, I suppose?’

‘Oh, no. But nobody ever saw Nessie look like that, I’m sure. That lady there is very beautiful, but she hasn’t Nessie’s expression. But,’ stammered he, suddenly struck by something in Dalrymple’s face, ‘perhaps, you think me rude; I didn’t mean to be.’

‘Rude!’ said Dalrymple, scornfully. ‘Oh dear, no! Ignorance—you don’t paint, you said—is not rudeness.’

There followed an awkward silence, for none could deny the truth of Ned’s outspoken criticism now that the fault had been pointed out to them. There it was, a likeness of Nessie without her charming sweetness of expression, staring them in the face so plainly that they marvelled at their previous blindness. If Nessie, now trying to hide her blushes, had not succeed-

ed in teaching Ned brotherly love, she had certainly turned him into a first-rate art critic, though the connection between the two may not be very obvious in a general way.

Mrs. Colquitt, feeling that her error in judgment had to be explained away, now announced that she never could see very clearly without her glasses. As they were not in her pocket, she had to go away and look for them.

During her absence, the others were startled by an unearthly groan, a succession of loud shrieks, hurried footsteps; and finally Mrs. Colquitt burst into the room, threw herself on the couch, and went into hysterics. Frank, who entered almost at the same moment, thoughtfully fetched a jug of water, at the sight of which she soon recovered. Then she sat up and

gave rather a rambling account of what had happened.

It appeared that as she was on the point of entering her bed-room, she was dismayed to find it tenanted by the Lhiannan Shee. This very 'familiar spirit,' not content with the usual ghostly trick of slamming the door in her face, had groaned at her most hideously ; 'and then,' said this full-bodied angel, 'I turned and flew.' It was altogether a very horrible tale. She had known all along, she declared, that the house was haunted. Was there ever a shipwreck on the coast around without her hearing the warning voice of the Glashtyn, or seeing the funeral lights to indicate the number of the drowned? And now here was this frightful encounter with the Lhiannan Shee, in her bed-room of all places in the world !

Frank took the poker and went to look for the — It really is very difficult to find a suitable term of reproach for a ghost; for while Hogman has a sufficiently unpleasant sound, it is confined to the hairy creatures of the hills, and fiend seems rather strong. Let us call him a fellow, then, for his ungentlemanly behaviour in intruding into Mrs. Colquitt's sanctum. Frank, it may be supposed, would have found it no easy matter to break this fellow's head with the poker, but he was certainly beginning to show a more practical turn of mind as well as a somewhat common-place way of regarding ghosts. However, his mission proved unsuccessful. He returned to say there was no making sure of a slippery fellow like the Lhiannan Shee; whereupon Mrs. Colquitt had a slight relapse, induced by the idea of sleeping in a haunted bed-room.

Though her husband's hand has doubtless been seen in this mysterious occurrence, it may not have been seen that Dalrymple stood behind him, yet such is the fact. Mr. Colquitt had often deplored the absence of reptiles from the island, and Dalrymple, having once heard him say that he should like a toad above everything, had obligingly procured one for him. Delighted with his new pet, yet afraid to show it, he had carried it up to the bed-room to gloat over it at his leisure. But the toad, less pleased with its position than he was, had escaped from him and slipped under the bed. It became necessary to recover the truant as soon as possible, otherwise there might be a tremendous row in the house. The toad had a monarch-of-all-it-surveyed look which put bribery out of the question ; there was evidently nothing to be done but go after it. After listening a while,

Mr. Colquitt dived under the great four-poster, drove the creature out on the other side, and was about to scramble after it, when, oh horror ! he heard his wife in the passage.

An ordinary being would have walked out and explained matters in some graceful and perhaps untruthful way. But this hen-pecked husband, having had his last scrap of courage torn out of him long ago, was in the habit of employing all sorts of subtleties to veil his proceedings. He nimbly leaped behind the door, slammed it in the face of his startled wife, and, while making hideous grimaces as if she could see him through the woodwork, commenced groaning such horrible groans as would have him enabled to take high rank as a politician. No wonder that Mrs. Colquitt flew. Such an appalling phenomenon would

have given wings to a creature far less angelic.

Presently, he entered the drawing-room in his usual way: with a frantic rush at the handle, a bent leg, as if in the utmost haste, shot through the scarcely opened door; and then a meagre body coming in to bow confidentially to the handle. After which he trotted to his chair by the grate and sat down, looking sublimely meek and innocent.

‘Is there anything the matter?’ he inquired, with tender interest, at the sight of the agitated lady on the couch.

‘Mother has had an attack of hysterics,’ replied Mona.

‘Indeed! what was the cause of it?’

‘She encountered,’ replied Dalrymple, scarcely repressing a smile, ‘the Lhiannan Shee in her bed-room.’

‘Oh! Ah! The Lhiannan Shee!’ gravely observed Mr. Colquitt, feeling if the toad was safe in his pocket. ‘I’ll go and look for him.’ And, seemingly wrapt in meditation, he left the room; but only to be called back by his wife.

A question asked by Dalrymple had aroused her suspicions. He had inquired where Mr. Colquitt was at the time; and when her husband entered, she watched him narrowly. His manner was altogether too innocent to be genuine. She was soon convinced of that, and now put the question to him point-blank.

It must be considered a remarkable fact that, notwithstanding his many shuffling ways, he prided himself on his truthfulness. While giving to those who chose to take them plenty of opportunities for jumping at false conclusions, he was always careful to avoid telling a falsehood; and when, as

now, driven into a corner, he displayed the courage of despair. So what did he do but tell his story from beginning to end, and, in corroboration, produce his witness from the pocket of his coat ! He grasped the toad firmly in the palm of his hand, and, gazing at it with evident admiration, held it out to his wife.

The result was sensational. Mrs. Colquitt stared in terror at the toad blinking at her venomously, uttered a loud scream, and fell back on the couch. Nessie and Mona hastened to their mother's assistance; Ned looked about in painful bewilderment; and, before Frank could leave his seat, Dalrymple was leading the surprised husband from the room. The toad never made another public appearance at Claddagh House.

By giving it, Dalrymple had earned Mr. Colquitt's gratitude; by taking it away, he

earned Mrs. Colquitt's gratitude; and by sowing dissension between husband and wife, it had fulfilled another purpose, besides the double one just mentioned. His object may be expressed in these words: *Divide et Impera*. He was bent upon marrying Nessie to whom he had become strongly attached in his own selfish way, and he saw that, as the feeling was not reciprocal, he had a hard task before him. Against a united family backed by the influence of a powerful body of friends, he would have stood no chance. Consequently he set to work not only to isolate the family from its neighbours but also to break it up into separate units. He had time, money, almost every advantage on his side; his most dangerous rival had been got rid of; the only thing against him was the fact that Nessie did not love him.

But did she love anybody else? Did

she still love Frank, a married man? At any rate, her engagement ring had disappeared. Yes, the little gold circlet, set with pearls and diamonds, which was to have been her close companion for her lifetime, was no longer on her finger. And oh, what agony thrilled through Frank when he noticed its absence!

When her mother had recovered, he made frantic signs to Nessie to leave the room so that he might follow her out; but she resolutely kept her face averted. Mona, however, was quick to see what was going on.

‘Frank,’ she said, ‘I should like a private talk with you. Will you come with me into the garden?’

So they left the room together.

CHAPTER II.

A DEADLOCK.

‘WHAT is it, Mona?’ asked Frank rather anxiously, as they paced the gravel walk together. Her authority was so great in the house that he felt almost everything depended upon her view of the matter, and he was uneasy because he had always thought her a little cold-blooded.

‘Before I answer, Frank,’ she said, in deliberate tones that made him shiver and look at her face, which, though not unkindly, seemed to have hardened with some set purpose, ‘I should like you to tell me the old legend about the fiddler.’

‘About the fiddler!’ he exclaimed, staring to see whether she was laughing at him. As she remained perfectly grave, he added: ‘But don’t you know it?’

‘I’m not quite sure of the details.’

‘Oh! then, I’ll tell it with pleasure,’ said Frank. ‘One dark December night a fiddler was returning home from a wake, when he was accosted by a stranger who asked him whether he would enter into an agreement to play for a party of friends during the twelve nights of Christmas. He replied he would, and the bargain was struck by his receiving the *ping earlys*.* A moment later, however, he was terror-stricken, for he saw the stranger disappear into the earth. He thought he had sold himself to a Personage whom to name is to summon. When he had regained the use of his legs, he ran to the

* Earnest penny.

vicar and asked what he should do under the circumstances. The vicar looked at the matter more cheerfully. "As you have taken the *ping earlys*," he said, "you must perform your share in the transaction, no matter whether the other party be the Personage you think or not ; but be very careful to play nothing but psalms." The fiddler faithfully adhered to the instructions, much to the disgust of the company who had come to dance. They thrashed the unfortunate man soundly and then disappeared, leaving him to limp home as best he might.'

'And suppose,' said Mona, 'he had not carried out the vicar's instructions?'

'Why, he would never have seen his home again.'

'Just so,' assented Mona. 'And now what you have to do is to fiddle psalms

most assiduously. No, Frank, you needn't look at me in that way, for I mean kindly, you may be sure. But you young people are so thoughtless; you need somebody to be always looking after you. I repeat, if you would keep a home over your head, you must do as the fiddler did—stick to your bargain and fiddle psalms.'

'Mona,' said Frank, with the quietness of suppressed emotions, 'I sometimes think you are merely a calculating machine.'

'Perhaps I am. I have so many heads to calculate for; and now, you see, I have to calculate more than ever.'

'Is it by Nessie's wish you have told me this?'

'Yes and no, Frank. I have impressed my wish upon her. She is so sweetly innocent that she must have someone to guide her, strangely placed as she is now.

I have said only what I consider right ; what, as her sister and your friend, I consider best for both.'

'May I see her?'

'With what object? To add to her distress?'

'Surely, Mona,' cried Frank, 'you know me better than that! If I love her, she also loves me; and I must learn her wishes so that I may act accordingly.'

'Nessie's wish,' replied the practical Mona, 'is to be left alone. If she had never seen you, she would have loved and married somebody else. Ah! you wince, but it's true. In my opinion, Cupid should be painted, not as an innocent babe with wings, but as a mad dog with tusks, and the only remedy for hydrophobia is caustic, applied remorselessly and at once. Although you and Nessie have been bitten badly, caustic and common sense

will cure you both. Now that she can't marry you, her love and yours will die out eventually. It's in the nature of things, Frank; we can't go on struggling or even wishing for an impossibility. And I know you are not so selfish as to wish it otherwise. Remember, in no other way can Nessie regain her happiness.'

'Yes, I see that,' admitted Frank, not without a wrench. Then he hesitated and at last stammered out: 'This caustic you speak of—is it a marriage with some one else?'

'Yes,' replied Mona, after a pause, 'but of course not for a time. I think it better to tell you the whole truth, for there may be a difficulty and we feel we can rely upon you not to add to it. Nessie is a most irrational little thing. As she sanctioned your marriage with Diana, she considers herself morally bound to lead a single life.

Whether or not she will adhere to that determination when she learns how opposed it is to our wishes, remains to be seen.'

Is it wonderful that Frank breathed a deep sigh of relief? Is it wonderful that he felt he had never loved Nessie more than he did at that moment? Condemn him if you will, but admit that he was human. He could not give up the vague hope that the future might enable him and Nessie to come together again; just as two streams which have resulted from a single river, sometimes reunite before they reach the sea.

Matters had now arrived at a deadlock which may be summarised thus: Diana in love with Frank and firmly married to him; Frank refusing to recognise the marriage and still holding by his engagement to Nessie; Ned in love with Nessie, yet restrained by that very love as well as by

friendship for Frank from showing his feelings; Dalrymple also in love with Nessie, who, however, did not care for him; and finally Nessie, like Frank, considering herself bound to him, now a married man. Truly, a desperate entanglement! To pull at any one string was only to tighten the rest. Some were pretty sure to break before the knot could be unravelled.

The first step in this direction was made by Mrs. Sherwood who, meek creature as she usually was, could show a fine set of teeth in defence of her daughter. She sent Frank a note requesting a private interview at his office. And there, when the cooking apparatus had been put out of sight, the cellaret converted into an innocent sideboard, and the sails and ropes tidied up a bit, he received this brown old lady in all her Indian finery, a gorgeous shawl

on her back and a blaze of rings on her fingers. She made a most ceremonious entrance, took the chair he offered her, and then proceeded to business.

‘Have you and Diana quarrelled?’ she asked, curtly.

‘I can’t exactly call it a quarrel. At the same time, there is an obstacle between us which can never be removed.’

‘May I ask what it is?’

‘I’m afraid I can’t tell you, Mrs. Sherwood.’

‘Do you mean to tell me, your wife’s mother,’ said the old lady, whose eyes began to glitter dangerously, ‘that, without giving any reason, you intend to live apart from your wife?’

‘Yes,’ replied Frank, looking straight before him, ‘that is a correct statement of the case.’

He had, it will be remembered, adopted

the same attitude towards Mona. Though he thought himself perfectly justified in his conduct, he could not defend it without inculpating Diana; and therefore, she being a woman and he a man, he had resolved to hold his tongue.

‘Have you considered,’ asked Mrs. Sherwood, after a stare of angry surprise, ‘what people will say about you?’

‘Yes,’ replied Frank, but with a sudden throb of pain, for he remembered that this would touch Nessie. ‘It is so hard—so very hard to suffer alone; the worst part of life is that our troubles must also fall upon others.’

The old lady was so affected by this answer which sounded stiff enough—though it was only the stiffness of intense nervousness—that she burst into tears.

‘Oh! Frank,’ she sobbed, ‘if you won’t

spare a mother this distress, at least spare her daughter this shame.'

She implored; she entreated; she almost went down on her knees to him. But, keeping up his resolution by telling himself it was for Nessie's sake, he stood firm. It was a very painful scene, but there is fortunately no need to linger over it. It ended with a passionate fit, for the poor mother was almost beside herself with despair. She hurled the bitterest reproaches upon Frank, and finally left, declaring she would tell the whole town about his shameful conduct. She actually did relate her grievance to two or three persons she met on her way home. But her spirit soon ebbed, and then she dragged herself wearily back to her daughter's side.

In less than twenty-four hours, her version of the affair had gone the round of

the town. Gossip, like water, will sometimes ascend, but more often it filters downwards. In this case, it reached a clay bottom of fishermen with remarkable speed, and set their tongues wagging and heads shaking. It aggravated the feeling against the Colquitts, and it struck hard against Frank, who suffered therefrom both in mind and pocket. He was pointed at as the young man who had married a dying woman for her money, and, when she unexpectedly recovered, felt himself injured and refused to have anything to do with her. Ned stood up for him boldly whenever he got the chance; but what could he do against the whole town, especially when Dalrymple, keeping carefully in the background, was directing public opinion?

Frank was in this awkward position. He had, no matter whether unwillingly or

not, carried off the prize for which all his unmarried friends had been striving, each with a certain confidence in his own ultimate success : so they now turned against him to a man. Though not undeserving of pity, he got only their envy, and though any sign of happiness would certainly have been resented, his misery was used as a taunt against him.

Nor was this all ; the old married men were quite as bitter against him as the young unmarried ones were. It was a shocking thing altogether, they said ; it was positively revolting that, after what had taken place, he should hold aloof from his poor suffering wife. So, under cover of sympathy and with a new sense of security, they began to flirt with Diana more furiously than ever when she reappeared among them.

As regards the weaker and usually more outspoken sex, they were extraordinarily reserved in their expressions of opinion. There was prevalent among them an idea that something had been withheld. This was partly their superior shrewdness, no doubt ; but it was also due to the fact that Diana was a woman. Had they not described her as ‘a horrid designing widow’? The greatest excitement prevailed as to what she would do when she had thoroughly recovered. There was not a house in which this question was not eagerly discussed, for they knew enough about her to feel sure she would not remain quiet under the circumstances. Not a few thought that Frank would be led by the ear to the home he had made for himself. Indeed, such was the estimate of Diana’s power that there was not a single member

even of her own sex but considered her certain to prove victorious in the coming struggle.

Meanwhile Nessie, under Mona's advice, had returned the engagement ring. Cain the Leg, who had been particularly instructed to give it to Frank when he was alone, had watched for him to enter his office and given it to him there. Then he stumped off as fast as he could, seeing something in the young advocate's face which told him he was better away.

Frank guessed what that neat little parcel contained. He laid it on the table before him and for a long time dared not open it. There was not a word of writing on it, but perhaps he should find something inside. This thought gave his trembling hands enough strength to open it; and then he saw the pearl-and-diamond ring nestling snugly in its satin-lined case just

as it had done when he had looked at it on the road home from Douglas. But oh, how different everything was! The token of his happiness had now become the token of his misery. Where should he hide it? He hastily thrust it into the cellaret, as a heavy footstep sounded without, followed by a knock at the door.

An old fisherman entered and requested the advocate to issue a summons against a certain woman for fourpence, the price of fish delivered. Frank called him a silly old fool, and, as he refused to go, summarily ejected him from the premises.

‘I’ll have the law on thee, Master Frank,’ cried the truculent old fellow, angrily shaking his fist at the door; ‘I will, as sure as faith. I’ll stand none of thy imperent capers; mind that, now!’ And so he went shouting and gesticulating along the quay.

Frank walked to the window to look after him; but suddenly started and coloured, for he saw a quaint little poke-bonnet bobbing across the drawbridge. There could be no mistaking that dainty figure; it was Nessie, returning probably from a visit to some of her humble friends among the poor. Though she had always given part of her time to charitable work, she had lately devoted herself to it almost exclusively; indeed, Mr. Hudson, looking at her pale cheeks, had declared she was making quite a martyr of herself.

On the impulse of the moment, Frank snatched up his hat and ran after her. How well she knew his footstep! She was trembling before he reached her side—trembling she scarcely knew whether with pleasure or pain. The hazel eyes were raised for one fond piteous appealing glance, and then fell and remained downcast. They

did not shake hands : perhaps did not dare.

‘Nessie,’ he said.

‘Frank,’ she murmured.

There was a wealth of feeling in those two words. They spoke of the present, the past, and the future ; they carried a small measure of delight and a heavy burden of pain.

‘I’ve just got it,’ said Frank at last, with a strange catch in his voice. ‘But oh, Nessie, how had you the heart to send it back?’

‘Mona said it was only right.’

‘Yes,’ said Frank, not without a tinge of bitterness, ‘Mona is a wise sister, and a very kind one. If only she too had been in love ! Nessie, how are we to meet?’

‘We must try,’ she answered, weeping silently, ‘to meet as friends.’

‘Friends !’

‘And, Frank—Frank—will it make it any

easier for you if I say I will never marry? For I never will; no, never, never.'

'But, my darling!' he burst out. 'There, I can't help myself.'

She looked up with a sweet sad smile to say: 'Then I must be strong for the sake of both.' But, as her failure with Ned flashed into her mind, she added, with a little gasp: 'Leave me, Frank—now, please.'

He seized her hand, held it for a moment, and then fled swiftly away. He loved her too much to probe her weakness. His own he knew.

From sorrow to joy is but into one neighbour's house—or, not infrequently, into the next room of one's own. When Frank reached home he found his uncle radiant with delight, a client having turned up at last. Major Christorey, said the old man, had become embroiled in a fierce

dispute with the High Bailiff about a right of way, and had put into his hands what promised to be a remunerative case. Why the major had deserted his regular advocate did not appear. If this was merely a kind device for benefiting an old friend, Mr. Maddrell had evidently no suspicion of it.

While gleefully talking about the great splash he intended to make in the legal pond, he suddenly stopped, his pale blue eyes filled with anxiety. He laid a gentle hand upon Frank's arm.

'My boy,' he said, 'have you just come from seeing your wife?'

'No, uncle.'

'Won't you take an old man's advice and be reconciled to her?'

Frank hung his head and remained silent. It was one of his severest trials not to be able to justify himself before his uncle.

‘Well, well, Frank,’ said Mr. Maddrell sadly, ‘you must go your own way. I can only suppose you have carefully considered the future when she and you can scarcely help meeting almost every day of your lives.’

So his mind, also, was concerned with the question that was agitating the town: ‘What will Diana do when she is able to get about again?’ But he did more than think about it; he set to work upon a side issue which he felt might simplify the main problem. And the very next day he brought forward his solution.

CHAPTER III.

A FISH DINNER.

‘I BELIEVE,’ said Mr. Maddrell, leaning back in his bow-window-like chair to gaze across his porridge at Frank, who sat at his superior breakfast opposite, ‘the officers have been invited to every house in the town except this. Don’t you think we should get up a little entertainment for them?’

‘Can we afford it?’ asked Frank, who clearly did not jump at the idea. It may be remembered how hurt he felt when this very same question was put to him by Mrs. Colquitt; but circumstances alter cases.

‘Of course, we couldn’t afford anything on a grand scale; but, even if we have to stint ourselves a little, we ought to manage a small dinner.’

‘Do you wish it, uncle?’

‘I don’t think we ought to be more backward in hospitality than our neighbours. Yes, I wish it, if you don’t object.’

‘Then I wish it too.’

‘That’s all right,’ said the old man, cheerfully. He took up his spoon, traced a few lines on his porridge, and then laid it down again. ‘Now,’ added he, pretending to be engrossed in arranging the white beard which reached nearly to his waist, but furtively watching his nephew, ‘what do you say to a fish dinner? It is considered a rare treat in England, I believe, and Manxmen could turn out something good in that way. Don’t you think, Frank,

our guests would take it as a delicate compliment?’

‘No doubt,’ replied Frank, humouring what he supposed to be a kindly whim.

It was more than that, however. Mr. Maddrell’s object was to effect a saving of expense, and yet set before his guests something they would really like.

‘Then I’ll ask you to leave the invitations for me.’

After breakfast he retired as if to write them; but, as a matter of fact, they had been prepared long before Frank came downstairs to breakfast. The old man had taken infinite pains with them. He wrote, it may be said without much fear of contradiction, the worst hand in the world—a thin tremulous scratching, such as a staggering hen might make and no ordinary intellect decipher. But when one came to

look into the addresses on these envelopes and noticed how carefully each letter was touched up and how elaborate were the flourishes at the end of every word, it was evident that he was not a little proud of his performance. He must have an uncommonly hard heart who could behold such writing as this without being moved. Frank could not, for it drew tears into his eyes.

When he turned the envelopes over, he observed that each was sealed with an enormous coat-of-arms : a thing so unlike his uncle that the explanation instantly flashed into his mind. The dinner, he felt sure, was meant to put him and Dalrymple on better terms ; and the coat-of-arms, by showing his family to be no mushroom growth, was to create a favourable impression beforehand. And such was the fact. For Mr. Maddrell was shrewd

enough to see that Dalrymple was a thorn in Frank's side, and simple enough to imagine it could be extracted as he proposed. This idea of his about using a grand seal, reserved for state occasions, could only have originated with a kind-hearted untravelled old man who knew nothing of the world. It was laughable, and yet it touched a deeper chord.

The invitations were duly accepted, and for the next few days Mr. Maddrell led a most active life. The energy that had lain dormant in him so long, was now pouring out in a steady powerful stream, which quite astonished his friends. It also made them anxious on his account; when they looked at his white hair, and the wrinkles in his fine old face, they said he was working himself into his grave. He certainly did tire towards evening: and no wonder, for all day long he was upon his legs.

Not content with fishing in the Bay with a view to the forthcoming dinner, he and Jonathan Vondy went off to set a long-line at night. In the early morning they returned—from some spot which they laughingly refused to name—with a boat loaded to the thwarts with congers, skate, gurnards, cod, carp, halibut, turbot and several other kinds. It was a strange sight, the black skiff lying along-side the quay in the cold grey light, the hobblers looking down with amazement at the uneasy cargo, some of the skate still grunting and the congers wriggling wild-eyed and open-mouthed, and the two old fellows sitting up to their knees in the struggling mass. Though Jonathan tried to look as if it were quite an every-day affair, Mr. Maddrell was chuckling with delight. In his heart of hearts he certainly attributed his good fortune to the fact that he had

never committed the sin of shaving off the gift of Providence.

When he had sold the surplus fish and paid Jonathan for his time, he found that, instead of losing by his dinner, he would actually make money by it: a thing that does not often happen to a man, whether his resources be at a low ebb or not.

Nor did Mr. Maddrell's exertions end here; he even carried them into the kitchen. It was lucky he did, for he was only just in time to detect the cook in the act of slicing the turbot into hunks to make it fit better in the pot, and shortly afterwards he found the two servants screaming from the top of the table, while a contingent of rats marched upon a sole. These and many other troubles the old man bore with unfailing cheerfulness. He would not hear of any assistance from

Frank, but insisted upon doing everything himself. Yet when his guests arrived, they were received by a genial host who looked as fresh as if he had been reserving his energies and good spirits for them.

In many respects the dinner proved a complete success. The fish was highly praised and the wines were pronounced excellent; they had never paid duty, having been in the cellar since the good old smuggling days, but their flavour was none the worse on that account. Mr. Maddrell, who had a wonderful store of anecdotes, poured them out without stint, and soon succeeded in making his guests feel perfectly at home. Captain Nugent and Morrison were charmed with him, and even Dalrymple could not but throw off some of his insufferable languor when he saw how anxious the old man was to please. He showed that he could be a gentleman when

he chose. Not a single allusion escaped him that Frank could possibly have taken offence at; for a wonder, he drew no slighting comparison between Manx ways and those he was accustomed to; and, by his deferential bearing towards Mr. Maddrell, he made a sudden rise in Frank's estimation.

All went well until the whisky arrived, and with it Sammy Kneale, an advocate of course, who explained that he had just looked in casually without knowing anything particular was going on; and was greeted with a roar of laughter. For this reason: he possessed in a high degree the old Manx 'faculty of discerning of spirits,' which the Scotch divines attributed to 'heritable magic,' for never was a cork drawn in Castletown, but lo! there stood Sammy ready to help with the bottle. Among his other possessions must be

reckoned a crooked nose and a reputation for humour ; but the latter was based mainly upon the former—an unsafe foundation, as Sammy sometimes found.

He set to work at once, first with the bottle and then with his tongue ; and, having no other subject handy, began to chaff Frank about being a married man. But here the crooked nose stood him in bad stead, for Frank was seized with a violent desire to pull it and only restrained himself with difficulty. Hammering away at the same subject, as these empty-headed fellows do, without the smallest notion of the feelings they are stirring up, Sammy eventually tempted Dalrymple to throw in a word every now and again until the atmosphere smacked strongly of brimstone, in spite of their host's frantic endeavours to clear it. Struck by the piteous expression in the old man's

face, Nugent rose and said good-night. The other two officers went with him, and so, unfortunately, did the two advocates.

In the market-place they came to high words. Sammy Kneale, having applied the match, retired into the background as soon as the fire he had kindled attained dangerous proportions, but the pleasure with which he viewed his handiwork was somewhat marred by a fear lest he should be singed himself before it was all over. Though careful not to let his temper get beyond his control, Frank expressed himself with great freedom, and Dalrymple retorted with the cool insolence which always proved most exasperating. It was the first time the two men had openly shown their feelings towards one another, and a more unfortunate time could not have been selected.

‘I’m not surprised you should be angry,

said Dalrymple, sneering; 'those in the wrong always are. When a married man persists in carrying on——'

He stopped suddenly and drew back a little, for at this insinuation against Nessie Frank's fingers had closed on his palm like the teeth of a rat-trap. But, before he could make a movement, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and, turning, he saw Ned with a pained look in his great grey eyes.

'Come along, Frank! He's not worth quarrelling with,' said Ned.

And so the two friends walked off together, arm-in-arm, with Toby behind, while Dalrymple shot a glance of angry scorn after them.

There was but little said until they reached the side of the sea. It was a moonlight night with a fresh breeze blowing out of the cloud-capped hills. The water flashed and sparkled to its very brim,

where a narrow line of white traced a huge semicircle on the pebbles, rocks, and sand.

‘Frank,’ said Ned, earnestly, as they approached Scarlett, ‘shall I punch the brute’s head for you? He’s taller than I am, but I could give him a couple of stone, and in five minutes or so I think I could make him fairly unrecognisable. Just say the word, Frank, and this impudent fellow shall measure his length on Manx soil.’

This may seem a singularly inconsistent speech for Ned to make after his declaration that Dalrymple was not worth quarrelling with. But, in his opinion, what should not be attempted by the clever young advocate whom Nessie loved, could be done by plain old Ned Christorey, whose mission in life was to minister in a humble way to her happiness and therefore to Frank’s. Few could set a more lowly value upon them-

selves than he did. Angry at the aspersion cast upon Nessie, he was quite prepared to punish the wrong-doer with his own hands, though it would be an undignified thing for Frank, and he had therefore interfered that Nessie might not be grieved. By using the word 'unrecognisable,' he gave one another peep into that honest, dull head of his. If he rendered Dalrymple 'unrecognisable,' he evidently thought he would put an end to all love-making in that quarter, and so relieve the tension of the situation before Diana appeared to make it unendurable. The Ned who had made this comical proposal, was clearly the same as he who had knocked down a cattle-drover to rescue an ill-treated dog.

Frank, of course, could not accept it.

'You are a brick, Ned,' he said, huskily.
'A beautiful old Manx proverb says,
"When one poor man helps another, God

himself laughs;" were our ears but keen enough, we should hear such laughter now. But, old friend, I must fight my own battles.'

'Oh! but it would be a satisfaction to myself to give the fellow a sound thrashing. We don't want him here. He is setting our little town by the ears; he turns up his nose at everything; why, he has even the impudence to ridicule me, Ned Christorey, and the said Ned Christorey would be delighted to kick him out of the island. Neck and crop, Frank, what do you say?'

'I quite understand you,' replied Frank; 'but remember what you just told me—he's not worth it. Besides,' added he, with a smile, 'I am an advocate. No, no, Ned; the days of prowess are gone never to return. Now-a-days we have to grin and bear what the law won't remove.'

In short, under the influence of the moonlit sea, Frank was able to view the matter more philosophically. Now that another proposed to do what he had nearly done himself, he saw its absurdity plainly enough, for he could look at it from the outside as well as from the inside. If only we could do the same with our characters generally, where would wisdom and virtue stop? If anyone would become a true benefactor to his race let him devise some method of correlating calculations made in the one scale with calculations made in the other. Had it existed in Frank's time, he would scarcely have come to this conclusion: that his animosity to Dalrymple was due to a wish to protect Nessie against a man who would be a most undesirable husband.

During the night the wind veered round to the north, and in the morning lo!

Snaefell, and Bein-y-Phot, and Garraghan were gleaming with snow, like huge shark's teeth cutting into the blue overhead. A frost had set in—an unusually severe frost for the beginning of October.

When it had continued for a couple of days, a party started to shoot snipe among the Mull Hills, a wild rugged district in the extreme south of the island, beyond the little hamlet of Cregneish where lived a community that had intermarried for centuries, still dressed in the old Manx style, and could scarcely speak a word of English.

Dalrymple was one of the party, a fact that Frank did not know when he also promised to join. Frank was a good shot, though apt to be wild; Dalrymple a poor one, though cool enough. There was no lack of sport, but it is merely with one incident that we are concerned.

Frank put up a bird which, as snipe often do, would not go away, but kept circling close around his head. Dalrymple fired at it; and Frank, naturally startled as the charge whistled past his ears, dropped his gun, which exploded, a few pellets lodging in some part of the subaltern's lanky body—his shoulder, he said. It was a most trifling thing, which a few friendly words should have set right. But Dalrymple, who was solely to blame, received Frank's apologies with absolute rudeness; 'this came,' he said, 'of going out shooting with a Manx clodhopper;' and after slinging his left arm in a handkerchief—he seemed doubtful as to whether the right would not look more effective—he walked home by himself. Before nightfall it was reported in Castletown that he had been purposely fired at by Frank!

So Mr. Maddrell's attempt to restore peace proved even less successful than Mrs. Sherwood's.

Towards the end of the month, Diana took the ball in hand. She announced her intention of giving a dinner to celebrate her recovery, and invited her husband to it. The invitation was worded thus :

‘Mrs. Maddrell requests the pleasure of Mr. Frank Maddrell's company to dinner on Halloween at six o'clock.’

Frank turned ghastly pale as he read it. He saw that his troubles were about to commence in earnest.

CHAPTER IV.

WOMAN'S WILES.

FRANK had not the heart to ask any of the Colquitts whether they were going to Diana's dinner. He did, it is true, make an attempt to see Georgie; but, failing in this, resolved to station himself near the gate of Claddagh House. Detained by some business in connection with Clague, whose trial was close at hand, he was rather late in getting there, and feared lest they should have already gone without his knowing it. When anyone came along the road, he moved on, but soon returned

to his post, where he watched and waited, supremely miserable.

It was a superb night, with a slight tendency to frost, and not enough wind to rustle the trees in the garden. Floating over the Skerranes was the crescent moon, lighting up the sleeping bay which quivered at her touch, and throwing the crags of Langness into bold relief against the cloudless sky, so that the long dark promontory resembled the frame of a beautiful picture. Overhead, 'the Great Road of King Orry,'* as the Manx call the milky way—because he said he had followed that route from his northern home—was stretched from east to west; Orion was just appearing above St. Michael's Isle; the Great Bear crouching upon Snaefell; and Aquila spreading its brilliant wings over Cronk-

* King Orry presumably sailed in spring, when the milky way lies N. by S.

ny-Irey-Lhaa. When the eye turned from the sky to the sea and the land, they appeared to have been blended together, so softly ran the tide of moonlight over all, here breaking into a sparkling ripple and there pouring around some black fantastic shadow, a solitary rock grimly defying an ocean.

It was a lovely scene ; but, as sometimes happens to us all, Frank was sadly out of harmony with it. He was in suspense, the one mental condition that Nature finds most difficult to soften. Had Nessie gone to Diana's, or had she not ? It was dreadful to think of what might be going on there ; for her sake, for his own sake, he fervently hoped she had remained at home. He watched the gate eagerly, and after a time opened it and peeped in.

As he did so, something flew swiftly by ; he looked after it and beheld a bat, flitting

away in sharp curves and vanishing behind the house. There was a scared look in Frank's face as he drew back and leaned against the wall, for he remembered the legend of Tehi-tegi. With but a slight variation, it seemed to have been so strangely acted over again in his own case.

And where were the Colquitts all this time? Frank might have known that Nessie, at any rate, would not accept his wife's invitation. As a matter of fact, none of them had done so. They were gathered round the fire, all engaged in an occupation peculiar to the season.

Halloween, as you are doubtless aware, is the one evening upon which the future can be readily robbed of its secrets. It is wonderful how easy it then is to walk off with these unlaidd eggs. There is no need to summon a benaaishnee; you can do it

yourself with the aid of a couple of nuts. It is more difficult, however, to explain why this should be so. Probably the explanation must be sought in the remotest ages, Hallowmas having been a great Druidic festival. It was then that the sacred fire was consecrated for distribution among the people ; in which connection it may be remarked that until comparatively recent times the Manx peasantry were very careful to keep their peat fires alight from year's end to year's end, lest some evil should befall them. This remarkable vitality of old traditions has been already illustrated in two or three ways, and we shall see more of it as we go along.

‘Now, Mr. C.,’ said Mrs. Colquitt, looking severely at her wizened husband, who was screwed against the wall, with his toes on the fender and his knees up to his chin,

on the opposite side of the fireplace, 'where is your nut?'

She pointed to a bag on the mantelshelf. He declined to take any share in such childish proceedings, so she selected a curiously-deformed nut and held it up to general derision.

'This,' said she, turning to her daughters, 'is your idle father who has brought you to pauperism. Let us see what will become of him.'

So she placed Mr. Colquitt upon the hob. He promptly rolled into the fire and was soon burnt to a cinder.

'No wife in store for you, father,' laughed Mona.

'By that same token, I should say there is,' he replied, audaciously, the reins being a little relaxed this evening.

'Oh, you wicked old man!' exclaimed

Mrs. Colquitt, pointing at him. ‘As soon as he has laid me in the grave, I believe he’ll be thinking of marrying again if he can get anyone who likes toads and such vermin.’

‘Mother dear!’ interrupted Mona, warningly.

Mrs. Colquitt looked with surprise at her daughter, frigidly at her husband, and seemed inclined to continue the subject; but, feeling Nessie’s arm steal round her waist, she picked up the bag and began to allot the nuts. On the centre of the hob she placed one for herself as a sort of chaperon, a regular Dutch-built old stager, carefully chosen for its unlikelihood to be frisky. The rest of the nuts represented her two daughters and the young, unmarried men in the town. Ned’s art-criticism having opened her eyes, she had put him on one side of Nessie, and Fabian Dal-

rymple, actually touching, on the other.

But the oracle, no doubt irritated at this flagrant attempt to bias its decision, resolutely refused to speak; much to Nessie's relief, for it was only in obedience to her mother's wish that she had allowed herself to be represented. A more stubborn set of nuts could hardly be brought together. They remained there stolidly roasting, quite indifferent to the responsibilities of their position. Mona suggested that the depressing influence of the chap-eron was too much for them; and, as they ignored even the tongs, nothing remained but to eat them.

However, Mrs. Colquitt had planned another way of arriving at the desired result. If her daughters were not to be told the names of their future husbands, they should at least have a chance of seeing them at midnight. So,

later in the evening, Sheval entered with the necessary ingredients for a *soddag valloo*, or dumb cake. The matron took no share in this performance, leaving it to her daughters and servants, who, as in the days of Jeremiah, began 'to knead dough to make cakes to the Queen of Heaven.'

While thus engaged, and for the rest of the day, they were not allowed to utter a single word, for which reason Mr. Colquitt thought, but did not venture to say, he would like his wife to make him a *soddag valloo* for breakfast every morning. They also had to do all their walking backwards, as if in the royal presence.

The cake was baked in the embers of the kitchen fire, equally divided, and eaten in the dark. Then all waited silently for the striking of the clock; for, before the last stroke of midnight died away, the future husbands ought to appear. Apart

from any superstitious influence, there were many elements present for working upon the imagination and nerves of an impressionable girl: the gloom, the stillness—only intensified by the occasional chirp of a cricket—the delirious scamper of black-beetles over the flags, the absorbing task of listening to the solemn tick-tock of the old Dutch clock, and the wild excitement as it went into a fit in its struggle for breath to announce the hour. Add to these the possibility of an apparition—a vague wonder whether, after all, there might not be something in what her mother believed so firmly, and you will not be surprised that Nessie clung tremblingly to her stronger sister.

When the clock struck she could scarcely help screaming, and the more she resisted the inclination the more powerful it became. But of a sudden her heart gave

a great throb, and then seemed to stop. Mona gave her a startled pressure on the one side and Sheval did the same on the other; and, huddled together in a corner, the three stared white-faced at the door, which was slightly ajar.

From the flight of stone steps leading down to it, there came the sound of a footstep, slow, distinct, painfully audible in the midst of an oppressive silence. Pat—pat—pat! It was a sort of muffled sound, such as a ghost might make in walking. Nearer it came: nearer: still nearer, until it seemed to be in the kitchen.

By this time Mona and Sheval were trembling nearly as much as Nessie, and not one of them could withdraw her terror-filled eyes from the door. It opened slowly and cautiously, to show the honest black face of Fido, the Newfoundland

watch-dog, who was usually turned loose in the house at night ! His entrance was greeted with a burst of laughter which sounded a little hysterical. To tell the truth, Mona, though she always strenuously denied it, was as near fainting as Nessie.

But for this untoward incident, it might have been possible to throw a stronger light upon the turn events were going to take. It gave Nessie such a shock that, when she went to bed, she did not even dream about a lover. She had a series of dreadful nightmares in which some fierce black monster was always threatening her.

In her mother's opinion, a greater calamity could scarcely have happened. Her affection for her daughter was urging her in the same direction as Mr. Maddrell's affection for his nephew was urging him, the one in his peculiar way, and the other

in hers. She was most anxious to divert Nessie's thoughts from Frank; and while his uncle, who had a similar end in view, was thwarted by an empty-headed wag, her failure was due first to some stubborn nuts, and then to a stupid dog.

As Diana's dinner-party had precisely the same object, it will not be out of place to glance at it here.

It was, everybody said, a very grand entertainment. The married men went in troops, carrying their wives with them. The unmarried men were scarcely less eager to pay their court to the beautiful woman who had been snatched out of their grasp and then cruelly deserted by her husband. Diana, magnificently dressed, more lovely than ever after her illness, received them as a queen receives her subjects. Graceful she could not help being; charming, she always was. Mar-

riage had not, as is sometimes the case, hardened her voice or soured her smile; she was still the same queenly, enchanting woman they had always known. This the men unanimously admitted as they crowded round her in the drawing-room, though, to be quite frank, their wives and daughters found several new faults in her and even pulled her dress to pieces.

It was noticed that each time the door opened she glanced anxiously towards it: no doubt, said the men, to see if her worthless husband was coming; no doubt, said the women, in the hope that she was going to have a chance of toasting poor Frank. In any case, as each fresh arrival entered, her first look was one of disappointment.

But at dinner her spirits were even higher than usual, and this was the beginning of a change that became still more perceptible afterwards. Her face grew

harder ; a look of defiance came into those brilliant dark eyes of hers ; and there was a strange recklessness in her manner, not steady by any means, but flashing out fitfully and dying down again, and gaining strength as the evening proceeded. Even when a Member of Parliament knows that his speech will be fully reported in the morning papers, it makes a considerable difference to him whether he is addressing full or empty benches ; and Diana spoke and acted for the benefit of a single person, Frank, who was absent. This, together with her natural disposition, will explain the difficulty she experienced in keeping herself strung up to the same pitch all the evening. Still, she succeeded in putting long faces on all the members of her own sex. The young ladies exchanged meaning glances ; the old ones, who were no less hurt at the desertion of

their cavaliers, whispered 'Champagne'—not such a very gross piece of scandal in days when hospitality and drinking were nearly synonymous. There was a very general impression that the truthful juice of the grape was bringing the real Diana into full view at last.

However, champagne would scarcely account for a desire to reduce the number of her admirers. She sent Sammy Kneale and his crooked nose to amuse the discontented ones sitting moodily around in silks and satins, and most of the others she detached for the same duty. She retained by her side only two, Dalrymple and Morison, with whom she flirted most outrageously. The youthful ensign considered her preference a well-deserved tribute to his own powers of fascination; but the subaltern, who was more behind the scenes knew better, yet entered into her plans

with equal zest. She had selected them because they were not Frank's fellow-townsmen; he would, therefore, be spared an unnecessary pang, and they would not be restrained by any scruples on that score, but would go just as far as she wanted them, so strangely did she mingle the womanly arts of persuasion—slapping and kissing. There was clearly trouble ahead for Frank, trouble for Diana, trouble for Nessie, and trouble for Ned. A fine load of ballast altogether, quite enough to carry many a good ship to the bottom.

Diana's purpose suited Dalrymple admirably; it operated against any lingering attachment between Frank and Nessie, and gave him a very palatable revenge. His resentment against Frank having been increased tenfold by the unfortunate affair after Mr. Maddrell's dinner and the subsequent accident, he made love to Frank's

wife in the most unblushing way. Her conduct, said the ladies, was simply abominable; in future they would certainly hold aloof from her were it not for a charitable hope that their presence might act as a restraining influence for her good. And yet, with singular inconsistency, they shook their pretty fingers at her accomplice and laughingly called him 'a naughty man,' which he received as a compliment, as was apparently intended.

Next morning some good old motherly souls with the best intentions in the world, meeting Frank in the market-place, gave him a full account of what had happened. Diana was watching with pain and intense longing from behind the curtains, Dalrymple with very different feelings from one of the barrack windows, and the red cap of a prisoner peeped through an embrasure in

the Castle wall. The three were the only spectators of the group.

Nothing, it is said, will induce madness quicker than the dripping of water on the forehead, yet such torture could be scarcely more severe than that now inflicted upon Frank. No details were spared him; some were a little touched up—for his own good, of course; he had to hear everything from beginning to end. All this, however, he could endure silently; the worst part came when they began to offer advice, often very conflicting, and to ply him with questions. What was he going to do? Why did he not live with Diana? No doubt she would hardly make a desirable wife, but was it not his duty to endeavour to lead her into the right path? In short, they unconsciously ranged themselves on the side of her whom they condemned,

and fought her battles, as she knew they would.

Leaving them in a frantic state of curiosity, which was increased by his unsatisfactory answers, Frank at length tore himself from their clutches and rushed back to his office, where he tried to think his way out of his difficulties. Diana was undoubtedly his wife; she bore his name and therefore must be restrained from bringing disgrace upon it. But how? By an assertion of the power which the marriage service gave to him as her husband? Never! By his love for Nessie? Never! By an appeal to Diana herself? His own self-respect would not allow of that. What, then, was to be done? Frank could see nothing for it but to wait, in the hope that the same thing would not be repeated. How little he knew Diana!

Though the distress occasioned by the bank failure had in some measure been relieved, there was still plenty of work for those who chose to do it. Mr. Hudson was more than once observed carrying on his own shoulders a pile of blankets for distribution among the poor, and in his labours of love he was ably supported. But a reaction had set in ; charity was felt insufficient to dissipate the prevailing air of gloom, and so there arose by the side of it a craving for excitement, which Diana's dinner-party turned into a definite channel.

A great number of entertainments followed, and at all of them she behaved in the same way as at her own. Indeed, her conduct grew far more pronounced as time passed by, though without bringing the result she desired ; wherever she went, she was almost invariably attended by Dalrymple and Morrison. The smiling

audacity with which she defied public opinion amazed and perplexed the whole town, unaccustomed as people were to anything of the sort. Some of her former admirers began to fall away from her, but chiefly because they did not like being left in the cold. Frank, well-nigh desperate, was very careful to keep out of her way. But one evening, just before Clague's trial, they met, and a strange meeting it was.

There was a dance that night, and though it was scarcely dark, the guests had begun to assemble, early hours being the rule in those days. Frank had been invited, but as usual had declined. Having a letter to post, he was hurrying along the side of the glacis when he was suddenly arrested by a remarkable sight—a wheel-barrow decked with ribbons, propelled by two men, and containing a woman. Stricken with a

horrible fear and trembling in every limb, he looked, rubbed his eyes, and looked again. There could be no mistake, however; the two men were Dalrymple and Morrison in dress clothes, and the woman was Diana, arrayed in white satin shoes and a superb ball-dress, which was only partly hidden by a shawl wrapped loosely around her ! They were talking and laughing gaily, ignorant of the presence of the stunned man who was gazing at them.

And now there came along in the opposite direction another wheel-barrow, which made Frank wonder still more if he were not having a frightful dream, for it also contained a woman, but was propelled only by one man. As it approached, he perceived the man to be Bobby Beg and the woman Black Deborah. Mr. Colquitt, sceptical about the Millennium, had ejected her from her cottage ; so, with Bobby Beg's

assistance, she was removing her effects, and, tired with her exertions, was taking a seat on the last load, which consisted merely of a few odds and ends.

Any other spectator than Frank would have heartily enjoyed the change that came over Diana and her escort as they drew near the other wheel-barrow, containing the mad woman and pushed by the idiot. They scarcely knew whether to laugh or be angry. Mingled with their vexation, there was a certain air of perplexity, as if they rather fancied that some elaborate joke had been played upon them. Perhaps for the first time in her life Diana looked thoroughly embarrassed. She was unable to do anything but stare at the mad prophetess, who was not unlike her in figure and features, especially in the dark hair and eyes. Both were tall, but Black Deborah was much the taller.

As the two wheel-barrows passed one another, her scorn of this foolish woman in her finery, with the officers in dress clothes, was magnificent. She drew her black mantle around her with a haughty gesture, and her eyes blazed like living coals; to the complete extinction of Bobby Beg, marching behind in his brimless top-hat and three coats, though he was not a very ordinary object either. Diana instinctively raised her hand to her face as if to shield it from this glare of light, and turned away her head. In doing so, she beheld Frank, who started into life and vanished in the darkness.

That his wife—he was getting more accustomed to the term now—should behave like a merry-andrew in the face of the whole town, was an appalling thought. Nothing affected Frank more than ridicule. And now every fool in the place would be

jeering at him, while the rest would be showering upon him pity and advice, which would be almost as bad. Nevertheless, he whispered to himself, 'For Nessie's sake,' and stood his ground. If, he said, there had been no deception practised by Diana during her illness, he would have manfully accepted the situation; but, as it was, he was determined to hold out against her. Unable to see his way to any definite step, he buoyed himself up with the hope that the timely meeting with Black Deborah would bring Diana to her senses.

The next day being the one preceding Clague's trial, he and his uncle were very busy. In the afternoon he received a visit from Ruth Teare, who had an important communication to make. Poor girl, she looked done to death. What with suspense and incessant waiting upon Mrs. Clague, whose end was rapidly approaching,

she was wasted to a shadow of her former self.

When she had gone, Sammy Kneale entered the office with a startling piece of news. Diana had announced her intention of attending the trial, a thing no Manx lady would ever dream of doing. As her husband was engaged in the case, she said she ought to be there to encourage him. If she carried out her intention, Frank knew that the general public would be even more shocked than at anything she had yet done. But how was he to prevent her? He went to bed that night in the most painful agitation, feeling that the morrow had fresh horrors, and probably a break-down in Court, in store for him.

CHAPTER V.

CLAGUE'S TRIAL.

TUESDAY, the eleventh of November, was a day of painful excitement in Castletown. At an early hour the town was thronged with people, chiefly of the farmer and fishermen class, but with a very fair sprinkling of advocates. They clustered round the doors of the inns, collected in groups in the market-place, and blocked up the narrow streets. Those who knew the miserable man now awaiting his trial wore an air of deep depression, for what could a young fellow like Frank or an old man

like Mr. Maddrell do against the Attorney-General? Some were strangers drawn to the scene by curiosity, a trial for murder being a most uncommon occurrence; and others were jurors who had been summoned from all parts of the island to attend the Court of General Gaol Delivery. This last class numbered sixty-eight altogether, four from each of the seventeen parishes. Long before ten o'clock arrived there was a general move towards the Castle, and the Court-house was soon crowded to excess.

Situated, as already mentioned, at the top of a flight of narrow stone steps on the right-hand side of the outer keep, it once formed part of the suite inhabited by the Lords of Man, and afterwards by the Lieutenant-Governors. It is a lofty, square room, with a large window in the roof, two doors on one side for the use of the jury and the advocates respectively, and another

door for the general public opposite. The Bench resembles an immense four-poster; the royal arms are emblazoned on the front of the wooden canopy overhead; and there is a door at the back for the use of the judges. Immediately in front is a table around which sit the advocates, wearing gowns and bands, but not wigs. Then comes a rectangle of long, straight seats divided into two rows by a central partition, the first of these seats on the right of the judges being the dock, and the corresponding one on the opposite side the witness-box. And, lastly, there is an empty space where the main body of the public stood, overflowing into the passages on either hand. The jury-box occupied the corner on the left of the Bench and faced it; in the opposite corner stood Major Christorey, Ned, the High Bailiff, Fabian Dalrymple, Dr. Mylworry, and many others.

The Castle clock had scarcely finished striking when there was a bustle at the public door, and a general turning of heads. The crowd fell back; a constable cleared the passage; and along the lane thus formed came a melancholy procession—a turnkey, two stupefied prisoners, another turnkey, and lastly the governor of the gaol. They entered the dock in the same order, and sat down side by side.

The first prisoner was a sheep-stealer, sure to get off, and therefore uninteresting to most. But, as a type of humanity, he was worth looking at. He had a small, bullet-head; a very low, flat forehead sloping back from bushy brows which met on the bridge of a shapeless nose; little, cunning eyes, restlessly wandering to and fro like a caged animal's, yet otherwise absolutely devoid of intelligence; a long, overhanging lip, with a growth of stubbly hair;

a squat, clumsy body, bent forward as if it did not contain enough vitality to support its own weight; and square hands, with knobby fingers, in incessant motion. This man, who could scarcely speak a word of English, was the descendant of half-a-dozen families who had intermarried for numberless generations. He had managed his own affairs shrewdly enough, the sheep-stealing excepted, so that he was neither a lunatic nor an idiot; and yet it was difficult to look at him and feel that he belonged to the same race as your own.

But it was at Clague that everybody looked, compassionately and anxiously, in spite of an irresistible feeling of aversion, for he was their fellow-townsmen, lately a rising man who showed every promise of rising still higher. Yet here he was in the dock, a hollow-cheeked, sunken-eyed, haggard prisoner accused of murder! They

could not help pitying him, indignant as they felt at the reproach he had brought upon them; they earnestly hoped for his acquittal; and those behind were ever leaning forward to get a peep at his face. But he never once turned his head; he sat like a statue all the time. There was a knot in the wood-work of the dock immediately opposite him, and by some mechanical rather than intellectual process it had caught his eyes and rivetted them. Only once did they stir from it until the verdict was pronounced.

A minute or so after the prisoners had taken their places in the dock, the judges entered. The Lieutenant-Governor, as President of the Court, took the Chair of State in the centre; on either hand sat the two Deemsters, the Clerk of the Rolls, the Water Bailiff, the Bishop, and the Arch-deacon. The two last and the Lieutenant-

Governor wore neither gowns nor wigs; the rest wore both.

The jury having been sworn, and the Coroner having made the usual proclamation about silence, the sheep-stealer's case was called for trial.

It occupied a very short time, for there was practically no defence. He had been all but caught in the act, and part of the sheep was found buried in his garden, and the rest roasting in front of his fire for dinner. Yet the jury unanimously acquitted him, refusing to take the responsibility of carrying into effect a barbarous law. And so he slunk out of the Court and out of the Castle, from the wall of which, just beneath the clock, he had narrowly escaped hanging in the sight of the whole town.

A new jury having been empannelled, Mr. Maddrell rose to do a little weeding.

With his fine features, his white hair, and his pale-blue eyes lighted up with a proud sense of his own importance, he looked a wonderfully handsome old man in his gown and bands, the edges of which he had drawn out on each side so that they might not be completely hidden by his long beard. He had been overwhelmed with congratulations on his return to the Bar; several of the judges had leaned forward to shake hands with him; the Attorney-General had paid him a neat compliment with regard to the danger of crossing swords with such a veteran; so he was in his best mood.

The defence having the right to challenge twenty jurors, he thought it better to exercise it, not necessarily to the full extent, but just enough to show that he knew what he was about. With Frank's concurrence, he challenged ten altogether;

and as the foreman of the jury eventually selected happened to be the tenant of a small farm which he had owned until the bank failure deprived him of it, he felt he had done very well. His man being an authority on parochial matters, and in the habit of getting his own way, the advocates on both sides addressed themselves particularly to him; with his decision, they were pretty confident the verdict would rest.

All this time Frank was sitting, in a most unenviable frame of mind, at the table. True, Diana had not appeared; but then a woman is always unpunctual, and she might come at any moment. It may be said here, however, that she had changed her mind. When told that if she carried out her intention, she would assuredly estrange all her friends, she yielded; for, little as she showed it, never

did a woman stand in greater need of sympathy than Diana did now. But unaware of the change, Frank kept an anxious watch upon the door, every movement there being answered by his own nerves. It was an immense relief when the case began, and he had to concentrate his attention upon it.

There had been some slight whispering and noise in the court; but with the rising of the Attorney-General, every sound was stilled, every face fixed. He was a little spare grey-headed man with aquiline features, a clear incisive voice, and a subdued manner. Like the other advocates, he wore no wig, only a gown and bands; and being, like them too, both barrister and solicitor, he was unassisted. He stated his case clearly, concisely, and without any attempt at rhetoric; his manner never once varied from a judicial calmness, which

almost repelled sympathy; but he pieced his fragmentary evidence with a skill that only experience can give. As he made each telling point, a shadow swept across that sea of rigid faces behind like a squall sweeping across their own bay. For the moment they absolutely hated this cold clear-headed man for the torture he was inflicting upon them.

The Attorney-General divided his case into three parts. 1. That the prisoner had raised the drawbridge: 2. That he had done it with the intention of causing Macdonald's death: 3. That matters had fallen out exactly as he had intended.

1. The drawbridge must have been raised with malicious intention. It could not have been done as a practical joke, inasmuch as, if it had any result at all, it could only have been the fall of somebody into the harbour and his almost certain death.

Moreover, unless there was some entertainment going on, which was not the case that night, it was the practice for everybody in the town to be in bed by half-past ten at the latest. Nobody was ever seen out of doors after that time except Macdonald and the prisoner. But the drawbridge was not raised until half-past eleven, or even later. It could therefore have been done only for one or the other: as he contended, by one for the other. It might be suggested that Macdonald himself had done it, with the intention of committing suicide and yet giving his act a different colour. This was quite impossible. Though the chains for raising the bridge were suspended from long heavy beams projecting at either end so as to give additional leverage by their length and weight, the task was most difficult for a single man. Macdonald could not have

managed it; he had not sufficient strength. The prisoner had, though he looked weak enough now.

The Attorney-General pursued his process of elimination—in the absence of direct evidence, the only one open to him—somewhat further, and then turned to No. 2, which he had partly argued already. For if malicious intention had led some one, now presumably Clague, to raise the bridge, what could be his object if not Macdonald's death? Starting for their walk that night shortly after ten, they went, he said, along the Douglas Road as far as Ballasalla, then turned down the Malew Road, and afterwards branched off across the fields, where they were seen last. Apparently their intention was to strike the Arbory Road and return through the town. Such a walk would occupy about an hour-and-a-half, so that they would arrive

at the drawbridge between half-past eleven and twelve, the time when it was tampered with. And here the Attorney-General offered two theories. Either the prisoner had gone ahead of the man whom he usually followed, had crossed the bridge, and drawn up the half nearest him; or, in order not to arouse his victim's suspicions, had left him in the town, slipped across the stone-bridge, and so gained the same spot. This latter theory he thought the more probable; for the sentry at the guard-room would have been likely to notice two persons passing close together, but not so likely on a dark night to notice only one. But, even if neither theory was entirely correct, it was of small importance. The drawbridge was raised so that anybody attempting to cross it from the town side must fall into the harbour, and the prisoner alone knew that such an

attempt would be made that night : made, too, by a man to whom he had shown a most determined spite. What was the object of it all ? The very thing it eventually accomplished—Macdonald's death. It was a carefully devised plan for revenge ; for the man who was always behind, would never be looked for in front. This, said the Attorney-General, was the key to the whole thing.

With regard to his last point—whether the prisoner had succeeded in his design—he proved that Macdonald was thoroughly acquainted with the harbour ; that his walk would not have taken him near any unprotected spot on the quay ; and finally, by the aid of the harbour-master, Jonathan Vondy, and several others, that there was a strong tide flowing at the time and that, therefore, a person falling over the end of the bridge would have been carried, not out

to sea, but into the harbour, where the body was actually found. Some experiments were cited in support of this evidence. An object had been constructed having as nearly as possible the same shape, size, and specific gravity as the body; it had been dropped from the bridge when the tide was at the same height as on the night in question; and in nearly every instance it had drifted to the same spot. This had never once happened in another series of experiments, when it had been dropped from different parts of the quay at different times of the tide. The fact that the prisoner, always sticking close to Macdonald's heels, must have witnessed the disaster, yet raised no alarm, was the most damning evidence against him.

A score of witnesses were called on behalf of the Crown. Jonathan Vondy deposed that the prisoner had raised the

bridge several times by himself; but, beyond that, there seems no need to go more particularly into the evidence, much of which has been related already. It is highly probable that many points which the Attorney-General considered material have been omitted from this brief report; if so, let the blame fall upon the right person—the reporter. One thing is quite certain: that, when the court adjourned at the close of the case for the prosecution, the outside public regarded Clague as a doomed man. As he was taken out by his escort, they looked at him as one looks at the face of the dead.

Nor was this feeling confined to them. It prevailed also among those who knew something about the law. That evening a singularly gentle kind-hearted man of the name of Carmichael, a retired merchant-captain, who had lately been

appointed a magistrate, went tremblingly to the High Bailiff's, where he found Major Christorey and a number of magistrates discussing the trial. So certain were they of Clague's impending fate that, as one of them would have to undertake the horrible duty of attending at the execution, they determined to end their suspense by drawing lots at once. There were some pipe-lights on the mantel-shelf; and these the High Bailiff took, divided into different lengths, and offered to each in turn to draw according to seniority. The lot fell upon Captain Carmichael, who, stout old sailor as he was, felt so affected that he actually shed tears. It was, he told them, the very thing he had been dreading; and, as he thought of the ghastly prospect before him, he very nearly fainted. Major Christorey, whose manner always stiffened the more his deeper feelings were touched,

took pity upon the old man, and earned his undying gratitude by promising, if necessary, to officiate in his stead.

When the Court reassembled on the following morning, there was the same row of grave faces on the Bench; the same shadow-swept sea of rigid faces below; the same boxful of stolid jurymen; the same haggard prisoner, staring fixedly at the same knot in the woodwork of the dock; and the same profound silence broken only by the voice of one or other of the performers in this melancholy drama. The time was changed, but not the scene. It was as if the light behind the painted slide of a magic lantern had been turned down for the night, and turned up again in the morning to reveal the same picture. The interest had deepened, but that was the only difference, so far as the general effect was concerned.

Frank, however, felt very much easier in his mind, for he had been told of the change in Diana's plans. As he rose to call his first witness, he showed that he fully realised the importance of his position. He appeared cheerful and even confident, while his uncle, stroking his beard at the advocate's table, had a sly look lurking in the corners of his eyes.

Passing by a number of minor witnesses, we come to Quilliam the blacksmith. The prisoner, he said, looked 'stunned like' when he saw the body being carried into the house. After that, he went away and sat down on the plough, just like a man who felt there was nothing left for him to do. Witness felt sure the prisoner had been in the smithy all night.

Ruth Teare was then called. She came from the body of the Court, and when she had entered the witness-box, her hand

trembled so that she could scarcely raise the Bible to her lips. While under examination, she clung firmly to the rail as if to keep herself from falling. She was dressed in deep mourning, which made her face look absolutely bloodless. Mrs. Clague, it appeared, had died during the night.

At half-past eleven on the night of the alleged murder, she deposed she met the prisoner in Arbory Street. His mother had asked her to look for him and bring him home; and, soon after leaving the house, she met him walking in the direction of the market-place. There was some one just in front whom she took to be Mr. Macdonald. As the prisoner would not come with her she walked by his side through the town, across the stone bridge and so to the smithy, where she remained with him until past twelve. She knew the

time as she heard the Castle clock strike. He was still in the smithy when she left. He did not go home that night.

‘I believe,’ said the Attorney-General, after vainly trying to shake this evidence, ‘you were engaged to the prisoner?’

‘Yes.’

With a significant look at the potential foreman he sat down. Hearts which had been gradually rising, suddenly sank again, for the effect of this answer upon the jury was unmistakable. But Mr. Maddrell now came to the front like an old war-horse snorting for the battle.

‘At the present moment, Miss Teare,’ he said, ‘you are not engaged to the prisoner?’

‘No,’ she replied, very faintly.

For the first and only time during the trial, Clague’s eyes left the knot in front of him. They cast a startled glance at the

hand with which Ruth clutched the rail, and when he saw that her engagement-ring was gone, he sank back and groaned aloud. That groan found an echo in many a heart—in Frank's, for one. Besides his sympathy for the discarded lover, he experienced a sharp pang on his own account, for he was struck with the painful resemblance between the two cases, differing chiefly in this: that he had set his heart upon a woman, and Clague upon money, though with a woman in the second place.

‘Was your engagement,’ continued Mr. Maddrell, ‘broken off in consequence of this unfortunate affair?’

‘It was.’

‘In the event of the prisoner's acquittal, is there any chance of its being renewed?’

‘No,’ was the almost inaudible response, after a long hesitation.

By this womanly device, planned by

herself, Ruth sacrificed her own chances of happiness in order to save her lover. As she had anticipated, her motive was generally misconstrued; and, while she had strengthened her evidence, she had also aroused a deep feeling of pity for the prisoner, as the faces of the jury showed. When she left the box, the people shrank from her as from a source of contagion; they formed a lane through which she tottered to a bench at the back of the Court.

The last witness disposed of, Frank rose to marshal his facts. Nervous at first, he soon warmed to his work, and spoke well and fluently. His audience, though unfavourable to him, were favourable to his cause, and for a time struggled between the two contending forces, but were at last compelled to let their sympathies go wholly with him. This young man, they

reluctantly confessed, had a most promising future before him. He offered no theory about the bridge or the cause of Macdonald's death; that, he said, was not for him to do; his duty was merely to show that his client was unconnected with either the one or the other. This he maintained he had done by the aid of Ruth Teare and Quilliam, two independent witnesses, who corroborated one another and proved the prisoner's innocence.

Mr. Maddrell followed on the same side, mixing a few very shrewd remarks with a mass of commonplace. In fact, his speech strongly resembled a workhouse plum-pudding. However, he was so pleased with it himself that he could not fail to please others, Castletown being very proud of this fine old man who, undaunted by his misfortunes, had boldly stepped into the arena again.

The Attorney-General having replied, the Southern Deemster summed up very briefly, for he said the case lay in a nutshell : Did they or did they not believe the evidence of Ruth Teare ?

The jury retired to consider the point, but the judges remained on the Bench, each lying back wearily in his chair. There was a general movement in the Court, a buzz of whispered conversation, and a sigh of relief, as if the tension had been relaxed for a moment.

The functions of the Bishop and the Archdeacon require some explanation. While the Deemsters were the representatives of Justice, the two clergymen were present as being typical of Mercy, in accordance with a very old statute which was abolished in 1845. Though their mission on earth was to preach peace and goodwill, they had to sit here in judgment

upon one of their fellow-creatures whose life was trembling in the balance. A painful position, truly ! The question put to the jury was, not as in England, ' Guilty or not Guilty,' but ' May the man of the chancel continue to sit ? ' The answer was a plain Yes or No. In the latter case, the departure of the clergy was followed by sentence of death.

The period of waiting seemed interminable. Clague sat staring at the knot ; the advocates had settled themselves around the table again ; and there was less talking in the body of the Court. At last, the Lieutenant-Governor sent the chief constable to ask how long the jury were likely to be. The answer was speedily brought back : ' Coming now, your excellency.' Instantly every face was turned towards the door ; and, amid a breathless silence, the jury entered and took their seats.

“Gentlemen, are you all agreed upon your verdict?”

‘We are, your Honour.’

Then the Southern Deemster put the usual question thus: ‘Vod y fir-charree soie?’

‘Fod.’*

The Deemster formally discharged the prisoner, and the Court cleared like magic, everybody being anxious to get into the open air to talk more freely. They had many questions to put to one another. Who had raised the bridge? With what object? Had Macdonald been murdered or not? If so, by whom? After all, the stigma upon the town had not been removed as they had hoped.

‘Where would you like to go?’ asked Frank, making an attempt to shake hands with Clague, who still sat in the dock in

* He may.

the same stupefied way. 'Would you like—— What is it, Killey?' he asked, breaking off to speak to a man who had just tapped him on the shoulder.

'I've got a covered car for him yonder, Master Frank.'

'Where are you going to take him?'

'To Mistress Gale's at Ballasalla.'

So they led Clague out to the car at the Castle gate and put him inside. But just as it was about to drive off, Frank stepped forward to ask :

'By the way, Killey, who ordered the car?'

'Your wife, Master Frank,' replied Killey, with a curious stare. 'She's taken lodgings for Clague, she tould me.'

This was a new trait in Diana. It gave Frank's resolution a greater shock than her reckless flirtations had ever done.

CHAPTER VI.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

WHEN the affairs of the bank were investigated, the deficiency was found to be greater than had been anticipated. How much or how little of the blame rested upon Macdonald is of no consequence. He acted according to his lights and failed; and we who are ignorant of the weights in the balance and are obliged to fashion our own weights which may be very far astray for all we know, there being no available standard of comparison and no inspector to test and stamp them, would rather attribute

his failure to misfortune. In any case, he is dead and buried, so let him lie.

The results of the bank failure may be briefly stated thus : The holders of notes were paid in full, with interest up to the date of redemption ; the depositors received back twelve-and-sixpence in the pound ; and the shareholders, unable to meet the heavy call upon them, were ruined to a man. To the last class belonged Mr. Maddrell and Mr. Colquitt, both retaining their houses and personal effects, but very little else.

Frank's father having left him a sum which brought him in about fifty pounds a year, he transferred it to his uncle and compelled him to take it. Upon this pittance, together with such trifles as they earned at the Bar, they had henceforth to live. Without a murmur, the old man proceeded to adapt himself to circum-

stances. He discharged the housemaid and retained only the cook; sold off everything he did not absolutely require, greatly to the discomfiture of the long-tailed rats who had come to look upon the old lumber room at the top of the house as a fashionable promenade; fished when the weather permitted; even borrowed Frank's gun occasionally and sallied forth to shoot a hare or a curlew for dinner; lived on almost nothing himself, yet would allow of no such abstinence in his nephew; worked vigorously at any legal business that fell in his way; in short, behaved as he had shown he could when the necessity arose.

The result of Clague's trial had filled him with delight. The dear old man had an idea that it was all his own doing, though he was very proud of Frank's share in it. Then came the ferocious dispute

between Major Christorey and the High Bailiff, whom, by the way, we have seen on very friendly terms at the latter's house. Mr. Maddrell pulled that off too. He was in great glee at having got hold of such a stubborn client; for the major, not content with the one victory, thirsted for another, and put this suit also into Mr. Maddrell's hand—against the High Bailiff again.

Nevertheless, even when Frank's earnings were thrown in, uncle and nephew had a desperately hard fight to keep the wolf from the door.

As for the Colquitts, they were, if anything, in a still worse plight, for they had but a hundred a year among the five—three helpless women, a man without any occupation, and a boy whose education was barely begun. This small sum, or rather the capital it represented, having been settled upon Mrs. Colquitt at her

marriage, was all they had saved from the wreck.

Thinking it all over, Mona felt that they really were in desperate straits. There were fish in the sea, no doubt; the garden might be made to yield something, if only Cain the Leg could be induced to bestir himself; and the few unostentatious presents from friends every now and again came in very useful. But, after all, what did it amount to? It was pinch and struggle and screw: wear old dresses, and try to make them look new: starve at home and endeavour to look cheerful and well-fed out of doors: a weary dreary prospect. Then again there was Nessie pining away, her cheeks growing paler, and her body thinner. A doctor's bill would just complete their ruin.

So Mrs. Colquitt and Mona put their heads together and invited Fabian Dal-

rymple and Ned Christorey to supper. Admiration, they felt, was seldom thrown away upon a young girl ; and, when spiced with a little jealousy, it could not fail to produce some effect, which time would mature. It was better not to be in a hurry, but just to loosen the old attachment gently and carefully, so that the tendrils might not be broken, and then the need for something else to cling to would make itself felt by degrees. That Nessie should throw away all her chances in life simply because she had met with a reverse, was altogether too ridiculous ; nay, more, it placed her in an entirely false position, from which it behoved them to extricate her as speedily as possible. She regarded herself, absurdly enough, as a widow who had been the unfortunate cause of her husband's death, but others would take a very different view. If she persisted in her determination to

keep all lovers at a distance, they would naturally suspect her of hankering after a married man—a very dreadful thing and quite untrue. Thus argued the two match-makers, the mother and her practical daughter.

Mrs. Colquitt, indeed, feared that this dreadful thing had already befallen them, for they had not been invited to any of the recent entertainments. She had been sorely troubled as one after the other passed her by ; it touched her upon a woman's tenderest point ; and, when she saw that an edict of social ostracism had unmistakably been issued against her, she was well-nigh desperate. Who had wrought her the evil ? There was always some ringleader whom the rest followed.

She never dreamed of suspecting the kind friend, Fabian Dalrymple, who dropped in nearly every day to sit by their fire-

side. Yet he it was, his continual insinuations about the vile conspiracy to obtain Diana's money having ripened and borne fruit, which was plain enough to Mrs. Colquitt, though the seed was kept hidden from her.

In her extremity, regarding her husband as a sort of Derby dog, she let off her frenzy against him, hooted at him incessantly, and called upon her daughters to do the same; then, seeing that she had made him positively ill, dosed him with medicine, petted him inordinately, set him on his legs, and hooted at him again. To make matters worse, a feeling of restraint had come between Nessie and her mother and sister, and under the grinding influence of poverty the whole family was in danger of falling to pieces. In short, the faggot had been separated from its fellows, and was now in course of disintegration.

An alliance with some good family would remedy this. Mrs. Colquitt favoured Dalrymple, and Mona Ned, but neither so strongly as to oppose the other. It will be seen, then, that the proposed supper was not such a wild piece of extravagance as might appear on the surface.

The town was almost deserted as Ned passed through it on his way to Claddagh House, from which, owing to his peculiar position, he had lately held aloof. Though anxious to say a few words privately to Nessie, he felt the evening would be an embarrassing one. So he walked along slowly, now stopping to talk to an acquaintance, and now addressing a little advice to Toby, who always retired like a confidential servant when any of the superior race were spoken to. There were a few soldiers swaggering about with short canes, several fishermen lounging on the quay, a constable

peeping from the station as he wondered whether it was worth while taking a look round, but scarcely anybody else ; for the night was cold and, at times, gloomy. The only person by the drawbridge was Jonathan Vondy, smoking and gazing thoughtfully at the sky.

‘Well, Jonathan, how are you?’ asked Ned.

‘Aw! middlin’—just middlin’, Master Ned,’ replied the old fossil, who had probably never been in better health in his life. ‘An’ how’s thyself?’

‘Oh! I’m right enough. What’s the weather going to be like?’

‘’Deed, but I wouldn’t like to say for that at all,’ replied Jonathan, from whom it would have puzzled a cleverer man than Ned to extract a definite opinion on any subject. ‘There’s nothin’ so contrary as the weather; it’s for all the world like a

woman. But just look yonder, Master Ned!’ added he, pointing to the sky. ‘That’s a mortal queer thing, like [a great spider eatin’ up the moon.’

There was a patch of blue sky over Langness, a break in the roof of the dark cavern which enclosed the night, and over it had been flung a filmy veil of cloud strongly resembling a spider’s web, in which the moon had become entangled. Stealthily making its way across the web was the spider itself—a fearful creature with a diabolical head, long supple legs, and an immense oval belly, quite black. The unfortunate moon seemed to tremble and flutter as its enemy approached; then it lay still and the end soon came. The great mouth sucked it down—these aerial spiders are in advance of their earthly brethren—and gradually it vanished into utter darkness.

As Ned walked on again, he naturally fell to associating this singular phenomenon with the one person in whom his thoughts were centred—Nessie. The web around her he saw, and would gladly have given his life to destroy ; but the spider that was largely responsible for the web, he did not see. It would have been a strange thing had he done so, being a dull, honest, good-hearted fellow who never looked for harm in anybody. Though he did not like Dalrymple, he knew nothing against him, and was far too generous to attribute motives without sufficient cause. He had tried to reason himself out of a dislike which he sometimes felt to be unjust ; but he had not been very successful, his efforts in this direction having been thwarted by Toby ! Toby not only shared his master's feelings but also added some bias on his own account, and, as Ned placed more

reliance in such matters upon his dog's instincts than upon his own judgment, he had to give way.

But where was Toby now? Ned, who had turned the corner by the smithy and stood on the road by the side of the bay, called and whistled without getting any answer. But a few moments later he heard, some distance ahead, a succession of angry growls and a man's voice raised in menace. As he hurried forward, a gleam of moon-light showed him a tall thin figure brandishing a stick at Toby, who was selecting the best calf to begin upon.

‘Come here, Toby, you miserable sinner!’ cried Ned, with a great show of indignation.

There was quite as little reality about Toby's penitence. For when he had got half-way to his master, he stopped and

looked back with regret at the leg he had been ordered not to touch, and then looked reproachfully at Ned. A penniless boy gazing in through a pastry-cook's window could sympathise with him here. His eyes glistened and his tongue had a curious roll from side to side as he moved towards his usual place.

‘What do you mean, sir,’ said Ned, ‘by showing your ugly teeth to a gentleman? Eh? Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? Well,’ added he, almost laughing, ‘if the rascal isn’t licking his chops! He hasn’t hurt you, Dalrymple, I hope.’

‘He knew better,’ answered Dalrymple, rather sulkily. ‘I wonder that even here such a villainous-looking brute is allowed to be at large.’

‘Oh! he’s not half as bad as he looks,’ said Ned, lightly. ‘He never bites without provocation, and that’s a great thing.’

How did he find you out? And, by the way, where are you off to at this time of night?’

‘To supper at Claddagh House.’

‘So am I,’ said Ned, with surprise.

Dalrymple looked equally surprised, neither guest having been told of the other’s invitation. This little piece of artfulness had, however, fallen short in its purpose, thanks to Toby; for it had been expected that the meeting of the two men would take place in the presence of the girl they admired, when something of their respective attitudes could scarcely have failed to appear in the confusion of the moment. It puzzled Dalrymple and made him thoughtful.

‘Anyone else going?’ he asked, as they walked on together.

‘Not that I know of.’

‘Quite a family party, then.’

As he spoke, a change came over his manner. He dropped the air of contemptuous superiority which he had hitherto adopted towards Ned, and grew very friendly.

This new departure of Dalrymple's remained unaltered throughout the evening. Instead of attempting to monopolise Nessie, he left her entirely to Ned and devoted himself to her mother. Mona, who was clear-headed enough to distrust him, could not understand his conduct. Here he was deliberately assigning himself the part of second fiddle! Surely it could not be that he had guessed Ned's feelings, and, like the French Guard of the legend, generously offered him the first shot!

Though it had been arranged that Dalrymple should take Nessie down to supper, he insisted upon escorting Mrs. Colquitt, who was at once flattered and

perplexed. It was a tempting theory that he came to Claddagh House for the pleasure of her society, and yet she could hardly accept it, difficult as it was to find any other. Had he only been flirting with Nessie? and, with the good feeling which he had always shown so conspicuously, was he now making way for one whom he saw was in earnest? Decidedly, Ned must be encouraged.

Such was Mrs. Colquitt's conclusion as they all went upstairs from supper; at which some excellent wine, a present from Ned's father, had been a prominent feature. The major, in conjunction with several others, imported his own direct from France, thus avoiding the heavy English duty and making sure of the quality. Perhaps a glass or two of his father's claret had something to do with the courage with which Ned now attacked a painful subject.

Arrived in the drawing-room, he showed a strong desire to get Nessie into a corner by herself, but would scarcely have been successful had not Dalrymple engaged all the others in conversation. He kept them going as a conjuror does a number of balls, and even found something to glue Georgie to his seat.

‘Nessie,’ Ned began, in an undertone, ‘I have something very particular to say to you.’

A gentle hand laid upon his arm caused him to raise his eyes, and he saw the pretty little timid thing looking at him sadly, imploringly. He drew a quick breath before he went on.

‘No,’ he said. ‘Are we not friends? Are we not brother and sister?’

‘Yes, brother and sister,’ repeated Nessie, approvingly, stroking him as she used to do.

‘And I wish to speak to my sister about a friend—about poor Frank.’

‘What?’ she exclaimed, with a start. ‘Oh, nothing has happened to him?’

‘Nothing but what you know, and that’s bad enough. How can I help you? How can I help him? I mean—well, don’t you see, things can’t go on in this dreadful way; and if you’ll only tell me what you would like, why, I’ll do it of course.’

Nessie caught his idea the more rapidly because it was almost identical with her own. Yet her lips quivered as she put it into words.

‘You think,’ she said, tremblingly turning over the leaves of a book, ‘I ought to advise him to live with—with Diana.’

‘No,’ cried Ned, wincing for her. ‘Oh, no, Nessie, not you, you poor thing. But

I thought perhaps I, as his friend and yours, ought to advise him, if I only knew what.'

'I have done so already. And you, Ned, who are always thinking of everybody but yourself, can do the same. But, if Frank seems to be in the wrong, you will trust him; won't you, Ned? I'm quite, quite sure you will never repent it.'

Ned felt so proud of her that he was unable to do more than press her hand. As they sat thus, they suddenly became aware that a profound silence had fallen upon the rest of the party. Looking round, they beheld Mrs. Colquitt staring in amazement at a Bank of England note for a hundred pounds. With the exception of Dalrymple, who had discreetly turned away, all the other faces were thrust forward to look at this wonderful thing, which Sheval had

brought in in an envelope directed in an unknown hand. Who had sent it? Who could have sent it?

In the presence of this family excitement, the two guests rose and said good-night. When they got outside the gate, Dalrymple linked his arm in Ned's and then proceeded further to astonish him.

'Ned,' said he, confidentially, 'if you would help your friends out of their difficulties—I mean not only the delightful family we have just left, but also Mr. Frank Maddrell and his beautiful wife—what you have to do is to marry Miss Nessie Colquitt. She is very fond of you and you are very fond of her, if you will pardon my saying so. Her family would welcome the match; yours, I daresay, would offer no objection; and then, hey presto! all this dreadful entanglement is blown to the winds.'

Ned fairly gasped for breath. How foully he had been maligning this generous thoughtful friend! And from this new standpoint how different everything looked, all the lights and shadows seeming to have changed places!

CHAPTER VII.

DIANA'S PENANCE.

IT was a cold clear morning, with the peculiar steely blue look in the air which belongs exclusively to winter. The ensign over the Castle flapped and fluttered in the gusty breeze; the clouds went by overhead like white smoke; and in the background stood the green hills by the sea, watching still, ever watching and listening.

It was the hour for gossip: the hour when man, having dreamt, seeks new material for the coming night, and, having

breakfasted, takes a genial interest in his neighbour. There may be some who take such interest before breakfast—chiefly cannibals, perhaps; but a good meal is the surest foundation for Christian charity. This was the prevalent spirit in Castletown market-place of a morning. When any malice chanced to get into the cup, it tumbled in with the dregs of the day.

Jonathan Vondy sat on the stone slab in front of the sundial on the glacis. There were some fine cod by his side which he was willing to sell if anyone happened to want them. A number of advocates were chaffing the old fellow about his fish, which they pretended he had kept in water all night in order to make them look fresh. To and fro walked Major Christorey, Mr. Hudson, and several others, as on that morning when our story opened. Mrs. Sherwood and her daughter were again at

their window in very much the same attitudes. But for them, at least, how changed the scene!

There came a pedlar to the door, with a pack on his back and a yard measure in his hand.

Hearing his ring, Diana started and trembled violently.

‘Who is that?’ she exclaimed.

‘Only a pedlar,’ replied Mrs. Sherwood, looking out of the window. And then, as she saw the bitter disappointment in her daughter’s face, she added, pityingly: ‘My poor, poor girl, how long are you going on waiting and watching from day to day and week to week? Why won’t you come away with your mother and leave this hateful place?’

‘Oh, mother, I love him,’ burst from Diana’s quivering lips. ‘Yes, I love him better than my own mother—for is he not

my husband? I've got what I wanted, and see what has come of it! I'm the most miserable woman in the world, and I love him all the more because I am.'

'He's a worthless fellow,' was all the mother could say to this passionate outburst, which had cut her to the quick.

'Don't say that, mother.'

'Why not, pray? All our friends—I've been talking it over with them—say his conduct is scandalous.'

'Not a word against Frank,' said Diana, firing up. 'I won't have it, remember. What have these friends, as you call them, to say to my share in the matter?'

The Indian-looking old lady folded her jewelled hands and meekly stared at them.

'Well?' exclaimed her daughter, impatiently.

'They don't know.'

'Don't know!'

‘Is it likely I should say anything that might be turned against my own child?’

‘And Frank has never spoken! He has been bearing my sins! Oh, mother, mother, surely he loves me.’

She had burst into tears. While still sobbing, she drew her mother to her side and showered down kisses upon the wrinkled face. A few moments later the tears were gone and she was laughing. She glided to the piano and played a merry little air, such as had not been heard in the house for many a long day; then back again to her mother with more kisses. But she looked firm enough, and very queenly too, as she drew her graceful figure to its full height and said:

‘Now, I’m going out, to tell the whole town what a bad wicked creature I am. No, don’t argue; you know, I’m logic-proof.

Would you have your daughter less generous than her husband ?'

When Diana emerged in the market-place, a beautiful stately woman, beautifully dressed, whose face did one's heart good to look upon ; when the major and his companions had wheeled round, saluted, and marched on again, glancing back wistfully ; when the young advocates had gathered around her smiling sweetly upon them as she used to do, then the story was told. But it was a fib.

It has doubtless been noticed that Frank had never once looked at the incidents connected with the marriage from any standpoint but his own. His view was essentially a narrow one, as all insular views are apt to be. Diana's may not have been broader, but it was naturally very different. Looking at her share in the

matter, she could not see it in the same serious light as he did. Hence, love and a desire to bring that love to fruition induced her to exaggerate her offence. She accused herself of having deluded Frank into thinking her illness a good deal worse than it really was.

This was a very bold thing for a young woman to say to a number of young men, and Diana, though not wanting in nerve, blushed as she brought up battalions of arguments in support of her statement. At first the advocates were somewhat staggered; then as she did not look at them, but continued to trace patterns on the ground with the end of her parasol, they ventured to look at her and afterwards at one another. A wink led to a smile; the smile spread all round the circle, and, lighting on Sammy Kneale's crooked nose, burst into a laugh. It was checked at

once, but the mischief was done. Diana looked up sharply and saw they did not believe her. The anger that flashed from her eyes drove the wag into speedy retirement; the others she reasoned with but soon left, thinking it better not to attempt too much all at once.

Morning parade being just over, Dalrymple and Morrison, in undress uniform, were sauntering out of the barracks at this moment. Smilingly raising their hats, they advanced towards Diana, but with a frigid bow she passed them by.

Though the subaltern soon recovered from the shock, the ensign, crimson-faced, and floundering over his sword, looked a most pitiable object. To be cut in this public way by the very woman who he had fancied was dotingly fond of him, was more than his youthful nerves could bear.

‘I say, Dalrymple,’ he gasped, ‘what does it mean?’

‘That we have been playing with edged tools and have cut our fingers, as we deserve.’

‘Don’t understand you, old fellow.’

‘Why, the thing’s simple enough. She has been using us against the man she loves, and now she is disgusted with us for helping her.’

‘The man she loves!’ repeated Morrison, in perplexity. ‘Surely she doesn’t love that fellow who won’t live with her.’

‘Oh, greenhorn!’ laughed Dalrymple. ‘That’s the very reason she does love him.’

‘Goodness gracious!’

Diana, having accomplished her purpose, walked on aimlessly along the street, and so into the country beyond. She had a vague hope of meeting Frank, whose favourite

place for exercise she had been unable to discover. Of one thing she was quite certain : that he was never to be seen in the market-place now-a-days.

As she approached Malew Church, she heard the sound of a fiddle, and presently a singular procession came in sight, with Black Charlie at its head, playing 'The Black and the Grey.' It was a peasant wedding. Standing by the gate, Diana watched them all enter the church-yard. After the white-headed negro fiddler came the bridegroom and his *doinney moyller*, or spokesman, who transacted all the necessary financial business with the bride's parents, the bargaining about the amount of the dowry being always very keen ; then several other male couples, every man carrying a willow wand in his gloved hands in token of his superior sex ! and lastly, according to the safe old custom for which

Tehi-Tegi was held responsible, the red-cheeked bride and her attendant bridesmaids, also walking two and two. A motley crowd of friends and relatives brought up the rear, all laughing and talking, many of the women wearing their Sunday blankets wrapped round them like winding-sheets. These blankets which served another purpose, that of bed-covering at night, were made of the unbleached wool of a species of small Manx sheep called *lugh-dhoan*, or brown mouse. So their wearers made a very picturesque addition to the procession; which marched three times round the church before entering.

Diana sighed deeply, everybody seemed so happy. It was such a very, very different wedding from her own. Married at death's door, she had struggled back to life—for what? To find herself abandoned by the husband she passionately loved,

despised by the world, and doomed to misery that would end only with the grave. This fit of depression, induced by the sight of other people's happiness, was the natural rebound from her recent hopefulness, which now struck her as having no real cause. She half repented of what she had done. A feeling of shame swept over her, and with it a dread that her act might be ineffectual. What if all laughed as those rude young men had done? Well, she could bear that if Frank would appreciate her conduct, but now she could scarcely think he would.

A little bare-footed girl came to a cottage-door, peeped at her timidly, and then ran in again, probably to tell her mother of the beautiful lady who was passing. But Diana felt she was shunned even by this child, and, quitting the road, went across the fields and walked home-

wards along the banks of the babbling Silverburn, where she was not likely to meet anybody.

By-and-by she arrived at a sedgy spot, with willows growing on the one side and gorse, still in bloom, on the other. Here the stream rushed impetuously over an artificial fall, to wander on gently again through the gorse which had listened to the sweet old story told by the young soldier to his love many years before. At the fall, part of the stream is diverted into another channel. Diana, whose rambles about the country had been very few, followed this branch streamlet with extraordinary excitement. Being in that painful state of perplexity, no doubt common to us all at times, when the mind turns eagerly to nature for some sign in regard to the future, she was anxious to find out whether it joined the Silverburn again be-

fore reaching the sea. She almost ran along the bank, rough as it was and studded with gorse and thorn-bushes. When she stopped, panting by the side of a dam, there was a beautiful colour in her cheeks and a happy glow in her eyes, for she beheld a streamlet dashing joyously back to the river. But the light faded the next moment. This streamlet, she saw, carried off merely the excess of water in the dam ; the greater part passed over a groaning wheel attached to an old mill, and then pursued its solitary way towards the harbour. So great had been Diana's excitement that, when the disappointment came, she was obliged to sit down lest she should fall. It seemed to this miserable woman as if the very stars in their courses were fighting against her.

After a time she rose and dragged herself wearily homewards, until one of her

fellow-creatures appeared in the distance, when she once more became what she was not. Few, looking at that bright winning face or the graceful movement of that tall supple figure, could have guessed how painfully ached that stricken heart; and yet some perhaps might have noticed the searching glance that greeted them, and have wondered what it meant.

On the stone bridge there was a quaint little figure in a swallow-tail coat, knee-breeches, and buckled shoes, whom Diana recognised as the old chaplain. Though he tried hard to compose his features, she saw in a moment that he had heard her story. Yielding to one of her sudden impulses, she smilingly advanced upon him.

‘Well, Mr. Hudson, what do you think of me?’ she asked.

‘That St. Peter has been rightly named

after a rock,' replied the old man, with a twinkle in his eyes, 'if he can refuse to let you in.'

She gave him a playful tap with her parasol.

'Oh, you deceitful creature!' she laughed. 'But there, you are a man, so you can't help yourself. Oh! I'm not going to be put off in that way; I insist upon having a plain answer. You have been hearing about me, and I want to know what you think.'

'That you are sincerely to be pitied,' he replied, gravely; 'that your husband is sincerely to be pitied; and that Nessie is to be pitied more than either of you.'

'True,' admitted Diana, with a little shiver, for she had readily responded to his serious mood. 'I shall carry that thorn to my grave. Then am I very, very greatly to be blamed?'

‘Is that story true?’ he inquired, looking at her keenly.

She blushed, hesitated, and then murmured: ‘Yes.’

‘And the—the—Remember, I ask not only as a clergyman, but also as a friend. And the proposal came from you?’

‘Yes,’ she replied, scarlet now.

‘Then you were the tempter, weren’t you?’ said the chaplain, gently. ‘But heaven forbid that I should judge you! I can only pity you all. The others have been nearly as foolish; and you know, folly is often punished in this world more severely than sin.’

Her own words to Frank! With what a heavy burden of sorrow they came home to her now! If only for Nessie’s sake she must persist in this story she had set going; and for her own sake—for the sake

of the love she bore Frank—she would let him know what she had done.

Accordingly when Diana reached home, she sat down and wrote a tender little note, begging him to come and see her. He need not be afraid, she said, of her trying to persuade him against his judgment; it was not for that she wanted him. She had to thank him for his exceeding kindness to one who had proved wholly unworthy, and also to tell him something which she thought he ought to know. 'Dear Frank, do, do come!' was the ending of her note, which was tinged with just enough mystery to make it enticing.

It was entrusted to Bobby Beg for immediate delivery, and he went off in great glee at having such an important commission. As he went dancing across the market-place, he sang lustily :

‘The king can only sail a boat,
And I can do the same;
I only sails when I’m afloat,
And that’s the for I came.’

It was very seldom indeed that the trouble of others ever penetrated his misty brain; it had to be very obtrusive before the merry simpleton could see and feel it. So, meeting Frank on the point of entering his uncle’s house, he presented his missive with a grin.

Recognising the writing, Frank hastily thrust the note into his pocket and turned away to hide his confusion.

‘That will do, thank you, Bobby Beg,’ he said.

‘No, it ’won’t, Master Frank,’ said Bobby Beg, with determination, ‘for I was tould not to come back without an answer.’

‘I’ll send one presently.’

‘No, Master Frank. I’ll just stay here till I get it.’

Frank went to his room, read the note, and after some hesitation wrote a reply. As an interview could serve no useful purpose, he said, and would certainly be very painful to both, he felt he was only acting rightly in declining it. His words sounded hard—a great deal harder than his feelings, but that is so often the way with letters.

That evening, when Frank and his uncle were sitting by the fireside, the former reading law, and the latter searching the Bible for quotations on the subject of beards, there arrived a letter for Mr. Maddrell. When opened, the envelope was found to contain merely a Bank of England note for a hundred pounds. They sat and looked at it with astonishment,

which would have been greatly increased had they known that, almost at the very same moment, a similar thing was happening at Claddagh House.

Mr. Maddrell scrutinised the writing, but did not know it; then Frank took a turn at it with no better result. But—why or wherefore he scarcely knew—suddenly it occurred to him to compare it with the note he had received from Diana. There was very little resemblance between the two addresses, Diana's being written in a neat small lady-like hand, and the other in large, round characters such as a beginner would use; and yet so tenacious was Frank of any idea that had once entered his head, that his suspicion gained strength, and his face flushed with thinking of it.

‘Uncle,’ he said, earnestly, ‘we won’t touch that money, come what may. Some

day we shall find out who sent it, and return it.'

'Most certainly,' said Mr. Maddrell.
'We have not come down to charity yet.'

Besides Diana, there was one other person who might have sent the money, and that was Ned. Frank determined to put the question to him point-blank on the earliest opportunity.

He had not long to wait, for next morning Ned entered the office on a very delicate errand.

CHAPTER VIII.

NED'S PROBLEM.

THOUGH Ned should have grown grey in his father's house, he would never have been allowed a latch-key. It was not that the major distrusted his son ; it was purely habit, which was to him what the shell is to a crab, only he could not get out of it so easily, for when his ideas had crystallised they became as insoluble as diamonds. His wife, it is true, had managed to solve one occasionally ; but even she had failed in this matter of a latch-key, which was a source of much discomfort in the family.

When Ned happened to be invited anywhere in the evening, his father always insisted upon making a martyr of himself by sitting up, so Mrs. Christorey had to do the same in order to lighten the period of waiting, lest her son should be greeted, as was often the case, with a course of growls kept hot for the purpose. It was not a very cheerful reception, especially after leaving a room full of smiling faces. If anything could make a young fellow dissatisfied with his own home, it would be such a contrast as this, forced upon him night after night.

Mrs. Christorey, well though she knew what a good heart lay beneath her husband's brittle exterior, had much to endure, he bristled so thickly with prejudices. Being a little afraid of him, she was more than once driven to a harmless deception to gain her end. When Ned was likely to

be late, she would get the major out of the room for a while, and, his old turnip of a watch being wholly untrustworthy, put the clock back. She did this on the night of the supper at Claddagh House.

Ned's return was delayed by Dalrymple's extraordinary change of manner. When invited into the quarters of his new friend, he could not very well refuse. He was too dazed to have a clear idea of what he was doing. There was a prospect of untold happiness dancing before his eyes, and though it had been divested of every atom of selfishness and presented to his vision even as a piece of self-sacrifice, he scarcely dared look at it. He felt, however, that he had been grossly wronging in his own mind a most excellent man ; and said so with a frankness that rather embarrassed Dalrymple.

Presently he rose and said he really

must go as his father would be sitting up for him, a remark that provoked a very disagreeable smile, though he did not happen to notice it. Dalrymple accompanied him to the door, where the two men cordially shook hands, after which Ned resumed his walk.

Toby, who had declined to enter the barracks, joined him a short distance along the street, gazing at Ned with an air of troubled perplexity. What new fad had his master got into his stupid head? Toby no doubt put this question into the balance and tried all the canine weights, from boneless beef at one end of the scale to a knobby stick at the other, but evidently could make nothing of it.

As Ned walked along the drive, he observed there were no lights in the hall, a bad sign which at once depressed his spirits. His knock was followed by a

violent rattling of bars and bolts, another bad sign, and when the door opened, he was admitted in ominous silence and darkness. The major, who had been standing behind the door, closed it with much unnecessary noise and stiffly marched back to the sitting-room where, in order to complete his martyrdom, he had purposely allowed the fire to smoulder out. After taking off his boots in the dark, Ned followed him.

Mrs. Christorey, laying down her fancy work, looked up with a fond yet anxious smile, for her husband was standing in a most uncompromising attitude, with his solitary arm pointing like a semaphore at the clock.

‘A fine time of night to come home at, Edward!’ he said, severely. ‘Do you ever think, I wonder, of your mother and me

waiting here in the cold, while you are enjoying yourself?’

‘But, sir, is it so very late? Surely twenty-five minutes to eleven is not an outrageous hour.’

It was with a start of surprise that the Major noticed the position of the hands of the clock. After a hard stare at them, he consulted his watch, and finally shot a glance of intense indignation at his distressed wife.

‘Just half-an-hour’s difference between them,’ he said, ‘yet I happened to observe they were together at eight o’clock!’ Then he turned angrily on his son to add: ‘This, sir, is what you drive your mother to by your dissipated conduct. The time is five minutes past eleven, and she has been tampering with the clock—deceiving her husband to screen you. What, am I an ogre

that my own wife should conspire against me? Don't stand there like a dummy, Edward! Haven't you a single word to say for yourself?'

'It is not for Ned to say anything, Reginald,' interposed Mrs. Christorey, gently. 'I am the only one to blame. I'm sorry now for what I did; but believe me, I meant it for your sake quite as much as Ned's, for I know you don't like to find fault with your son.'

'But, mother, I am later than I intended to be,' said Ned, laying his hand on her shoulder.

His father looked at him curiously. 'What have you been doing?' he asked.

'Enjoying some of your excellent wine, for one thing.'

'Stuff!' said his father, though somewhat mollified by this diplomatic touch. 'I don't want to hear what you had to eat or

drink. Did you settle that business?’

‘You know, Reginald——’

‘Please, let Ned speak for himself.’

‘Some time ago, sir,’ stammered Ned,
‘I told you my feelings on that subject.’

‘Sit down,’ said the major, pointing to a chair and taking a seat himself. ‘I must see if I can’t knock a little reason into your head. You place the matter on very high ground—certain fanciful duties of love and friendship. Well, I’ll endeavour to meet you there. We have to deal with five different persons—young Maddrell, his wife, Nessie Colquitt, yourself, and that fellow Dalrymple. Be good enough,’ said he, seeing that Ned was about to make some remark, ‘not to interrupt me; when I have finished, it will be your turn to speak. Mrs. Maddrell is in love with her husband—strange, but true; he is in love with Nessie, who is fond of you, you admit;

and you are in love with her and very friendly with the other two. Now, that is the position. What we have to do is to find out a way of pleasing everybody, more or less. There is only one way—by your marrying Nessie. If you do that, husband and wife will assuredly drift together in time and both will attain a degree of happiness which would otherwise be unattainable for either; Nessie will be happy because they are, and also because she has got a devoted husband; and you, who have done all this, would, I should think, be pretty well satisfied on their account, to say nothing of your own as you seem to think it of no importance.'

Though the words were harsh, the major deemed it prudent to pause here to steady his voice, and the look he gave his stalwart son was not devoid of pride. But, seeing Ned raise his head, he feared lest his

weakness should be detected, and became as hard as nails again.

‘On the other hand, Ned,’ he proceeded, ‘if you continue obstinate, you substitute for all this happiness misery—misery—nothing but misery. In all probability, that fellow Dalrymple will step into your shoes, marry Nessie, and make her life a burden to her, thus causing perpetual discord between the other two, the Maddrells,’

‘I assure you,’ said Ned, ‘you are quite mistaken about Dalrymple. I was labouring,’ added he, with characteristic honesty, ‘under the same mistake myself until this evening. Dalrymple is a thoroughly good disinterested friend. You look astonished, sir, but you’ll agree with me when I tell you that he has just been giving me the same advice as you are now doing.’

‘What! Advising you to marry Nessie?’

‘Yes. It’s a fact, I assure you.’

The major sat bolt upright in his chair, and stared blankly at his wife. This was the most astounding thing that ever he had heard; it gave his convictions such a rude shock that he felt like a man arrived at dead of night in a new country. Now that Dalrymple advised the marriage, he did not feel so very sure of its advantages. Was there not something lurking in the background? Like a fox that sees a fat hen running open-winged towards it, he began to suspect a trap and to sniff round a bit.

‘What did you say to him, Ned?’ he asked.

‘I said—well, I scarcely know what I did say. I was so bewildered.’

‘I’m not surprised at that. And what do you say to me?’

‘ You shall have my answer to-morrow evening, if that will suit you.’

The major readily assented, glad to have some time in which to turn round.

It was with reference to this answer that Ned started next morning for the advocate's office on the quay, his purpose being to ascertain whether Frank would think it unfriendly of him to propose to Nessie. A delicate errand surely, and one that few men would undertake ! Of course, it may be said Frank could offer no opposition, for he had not the shadow of a right to do so ; but while he bowed to the inevitable, his real feelings would never appear. This may be true enough, but it was not Ned's way of looking at the matter. His own unvarnished sincerity led him to expect the same in others ; when a choice of motives was offered him, he invariably chose the best for another and the worst for him-

self; and his idea of love was a ceaseless endeavour to confer the greatest possible happiness upon the person loved, without any regard to himself. No doubt, the idea is out of date, but it is worth putting on record. It accurately describes the nature of his own love for Nessie, and he was not likely to credit his friend with anything less. If, then, it was necessary to her happiness that he should marry her, he could anticipate from Frank nothing but hearty approval.

There certainly was a doubt in Ned's mind, but it sprang from a very different cause. He could scarcely believe in this wonderful method for reconciling his duty with his inclinations. Opposed to all his previous experience, it promised such a wealth of happiness to himself that he felt there must be something wrong. But he consoled himself with the reflection that if

his dull wits had been led astray by his heart, Nessie would set him right, even if Frank failed to do so. Such was his conclusion as he walked along the street.

There were a number of ladies talking together on the pavement opposite a chemist's shop. Diana was advancing towards them, apparently with the intention of joining them. But as she approached they coldly bowed and turned their backs upon her. She paused a moment as if her power of movement had been suspended, and then with a haughty glance went by, quivering as she tried to suppress the look of pain in her beautiful face. It was not the sort of thing that Ned could witness unmoved; he strode up to her and took her hand.

‘Please, don’t take any notice of such rudeness,’ he said. ‘I shouldn’t have

thought it possible of any lady in this town.'

'Ah! you are a man,' she said, with a grateful smile. 'You can't understand us women. We are all alike, always in extremes, good or bad, flitting from one to the other and back again before a man has time to open his eyes. If I had been in the place of one of them and she in mine, I daresay I should have behaved in exactly the same way. But that,' added she, sadly, 'doesn't make it any easier for the victim.'

'Not at all,' assented Ned, looking very puzzled at Diana's views of her own sex. 'But just come back with me. We'll show them you have one friend at any rate.'

So, to please him, Diana went back with him. As they passed the ladies who had incurred his displeasure, he gave them a

most stately bow and marched by, as stiff as his father.

‘Have you seen him lately, Ned?’ Diana ventured to ask.

‘Yes,’ he replied, knowing quite well that the ‘him’ referred to Frank, ‘I’m going to see him now.’

Though she did not put her request into words, the appealing look she gave him was quite enough, and no answer could have been more complete than the sympathy expressed in his rugged face. Was he not even then going on a mission which had for its object the very thing she so earnestly desired?

‘Oh, Ned,’ she said, ‘how can I thank you?’

Before he could answer, they had come into full view of the market-place. And there they beheld the soldiers drawn up in line, the sun glistening on their fixed

bayonets and the drawn swords of the three officers. It was a menacing attitude and the crowd near the Castle did not seem very clear about their intentions.

‘Now, remember, men,’ roared Nugent, ‘nothing but cold steel. Charge!’

The bugler startled the solemn rooks on the Castle walls, but the thin red line sweeping across the market-place startled the crowd still more. With surprising speed, they dispersed in all directions. The glacis was stormed without misadventure of any sort, and apparently to the complete satisfaction of the captain who had lately taken a fancy to these military experiments.

But, amid the rush of people, Ned detected a quaint little poke-bonnet which he recognised as Nessie’s; and, taking an abrupt leave of Diana, he hurried to the rescue. Dalrymple, who had noticed her

at the same moment, was also proceeding to her assistance: but, when he saw Ned, he waved his hand encouragingly and turned to follow his men. During the brief hesitation that occurred, the spectators had contrived to get disentangled from one another; so Ned, seeing Nessie quietly walking off with Mr. Hudson as an escort, thought it best to go on his way.

In one respect, the incident was a most gratifying one; it showed him he was not mistaken about Dalrymple. When we keep turning a thing over and over in our minds, it is very apt to lose its reality. We look at it in so many different aspects that we forget our original standpoint; the outline consequently becomes blurred, and the mental impression altogether disturbed. Did it happen yesterday or the day before? We scarcely know. Did it happen at all? We are doubtful even

about that. It is no longer the remembrance of an actual event; it is a dream. This is especially the case when it accords with our wishes, which, we remember, have a way of calling in the imagination to play strange tricks upon the memory.

It is no wonder, then, that Ned had been half-inclined to distrust his recollection of what had taken place on the previous night. Perhaps he had been deceiving himself; perhaps Dalrymple had meant something very different, or perhaps he had not known his own mind and might change it in the morning. The object in view was so very precious to Ned that he could not help harassing himself with all manner of doubts. There was yet another, which he had fought against strenuously but not with entire success. Might not the major's claret have had something to do with Dalrymple's sudden attack of friendliness?

However, all that was at an end now. Ned was in an uncommonly cheery mood when he entered Frank's office.

‘You, Ned!’ exclaimed Frank, looking up from the papers before him. ‘Take a seat, old chap. Your father has become a good client to my uncle; are you bringing a case to the nephew?’

‘No,’ replied Ned, sitting on the table, ‘I have come about Nessie whose happiness we both have at heart. You are a married man——’

‘Why remind me of that?’ demanded Frank, sharply.

‘Not to pain you, Frank, you may be quite sure. But because you can't marry Nessie.’

‘And don't I know that?’

‘Oh, Frank, please don't make my task more difficult than it is! Don't you see, Nessie must marry somebody, otherwise she will pine her life away in misery.’

‘ And whom do you propose ?’

‘ Well, I thought perhaps I could make her happier than anybody else, not from any merits of my own, but because we have always been like brother and sister.’

Frank, who had leaned back in his chair to stare at Ned, stared harder than ever during this speech. Notwithstanding its modesty, he almost felt inclined to resent it as a piece of rank impertinence. But Ned had clearly no intention of saying anything offensive. His face was grave and earnest, and his great grey eyes beamed with a kindly light which blinded him to the effect he was producing. Frank ended his scrutiny with a gruff laugh. This, then, was the particular psalm that Mona meant him to fiddle ! He was to help Ned to marry Nessie ! Yet why not ? It would be better for her, better for him, better perhaps for himself.

‘What do you wish me to say, Ned?’ he asked.

‘I want your opinion, Frank. Do you think Nessie would be happier if she were to marry me? Mind, I don’t say she will, of course; I can but ask her. And, if she sees it will benefit others, she will do it for that reason alone. But there, you know that as well as I do.’

‘Yes,’ replied Frank, desperately, ‘I daresay it would be a good thing for her. Indeed,’ added he, anxious not to speak in a grudging spirit, ‘I have no doubt it would, for she could not have a better husband than you, Ned, if she were to search the wide world through.’

‘Thank you for that, Frank, but I don’t deserve it. I’ll go and ask her at once.’

He went out radiant, but immediately afterwards pushed his head in through the door to add:

‘ May I tell her what you say about it ?’

Frank, as he noticed with surprise, had flung his arms on the table and buried his face in them as if he was in deep distress. But when he looked up—which he did with a start—his features were composed enough.

‘ Yes,’ he replied, ‘ tell her by all means.’

Ned closed the door again and walked thoughtfully along the quay.

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW ALLIANCE.

SINCE Diana's illness, Nessie had never once met her, unless seeing her in St. Mary's on Sunday or getting an occasional glimpse of her in the distance can be called meeting. Necessity, design, and accident had all contributed towards this result. In consequence of Diana's marriage, it became the duty of those who wished to make or continue her acquaintance, to call upon her, her first appearance in church being the signal that she was ready to receive such callers. But this Mrs. Colquitt had

purposely omitted to do, and where the mother would not go, the daughter could not. Thus prevented from meeting at their own homes, Diana and Nessie were not likely to meet at anybody else's, the Colquitts not having been invited anywhere; and, with all this awkwardness between them, they carefully avoided a chance encounter in the street.

At the same time there could scarcely be two persons more anxious for one another's friendship than this girl so strangely bereft of her lover and this woman so strangely wedded to him. He had become, not a source of discord between them, but rather a bond of union. If either had ever entertained any jealousy of the other—and Diana undoubtedly had—it was dead and buried, and over its grave had grown none but the kindest

feelings, tinged deeply with sorrow and regret. They longed for an opportunity of breaking down the barrier between them, so that their conduct might appear in its true light and not cause unnecessary suffering, as they knew it must be doing. Diana pitied the girl on whom she had wrought a life-long injury, and Nessie pitied the woman who had brought so much misery upon herself and Frank. But the past could not be undone: why then rail against it and reduce the present and the future to the same dreary level? Better far to make a fresh start. Such was Diana's view, as expressed to Frank and afterwards acted upon. It was also Nessie's, for she liked to see people cheerful and happy and always did her utmost to make them so. If only the two could have come together and freely discussed the

matter, they would have settled it long ago. But, with the lapse of time, this had become more difficult.

So when Nessie, dragged by Mr. Hudson out of the path of the soldiers as they stormed the glacis and swept the spectators on either side, suddenly found herself face to face with Frank's wife, she blushed and hung her head. As she stood there trembling, the chaplain looked in some perplexity from the pretty shy little thing by his side to the tall and beautiful woman who seemed scarcely less confused. Then a pleasant smile came into his benevolent old face; he led Nessie up to Diana, and, leaving them together, slipped away in the crowd.

'I have been longing to meet you,' said Nessie, giving her hand to Diana and looking up at her timidly. 'I wanted so

much to tell you how very, very sorry I am for you.'

'Sorry for me! Why, Nessie?'

Nessie's full answer would have been :
'Because you have married a man who does not love you.' But what she said was :

'Because you must be so unhappy.'

'That is very sweet of you, Nessie,' said Diana, gently. 'If anyone else had been in your place she would never have forgiven me.'

'Oh, no; indeed, no; I have nothing to forgive. A great misfortune has befallen us all, and that, I think, must make us feel for one another. Why,' added Nessie, with a shy glance at Diana, 'I did fear—I was wronging you, I see now—I did fear you might be a little angry with me, and I'm so pleased you are not.'

'Angry with you! Surely not. How could I be?'

‘People can’t change all of a sudden—and he can’t—and I thought perhaps you might blame me. But oh, Diana, don’t think hardly of him. He will turn to you in time, if only you’ll be patient.’

‘Nessie,’ said Diana, looking gravely at her, ‘I should like to kiss you.’ And then the dark eyes began to glisten, and, seizing Nessie’s arm, she panted: ‘Come! Come with me, or I shall cry.’

Dalrymple, standing on the glacis by the sundial, saw them walking away side by side, and smiled. That active nose of his was in incessant motion, as was always the case when he was pleased but had to keep his feelings to himself. It was with a peculiarly satisfied air that, the assault being over, he sent his sword home into his scabbard and descended to the ground.

When the ladies, who were still standing in front of the chemist’s, beheld the advanc-

ing couple, they nudged one another and stared in amazement out of the corners of their eyes. That these two should consort together, was about the oddest thing that had come within the range of their experience. Nessie shivered as she approached. It was most distressing to the sensitive girl that she should be shunned by her former friends, and for no reason that she could see. But Diana, whose powers of self-control returned with the need of exercising them, only smiled contemptuously and placed herself on the nearer side of her companion as if to protect her. Just as she and Ned had gone by a short time before, so she and Nessie went by now.

‘Do you ever think of yourself?’ asked Diana presently.

‘Oh, but I’m thinking of myself now.’

‘No, dear, only of him and me.’

‘His happiness is mine,’ said Nessie, simply, ‘and yours. If there were any chance of—of—you know what—if you weren’t really, really married, I’m afraid I couldn’t surrender him so easily. But there is no chance, and so I have begged of him to forget the past. And, if he can’t just yet, you won’t turn against him, will you, Diana? Oh, just think what his life would be if he were left altogether alone!’ she ended, with a start and a scream.

A man, who had been supporting himself against a stile, was advancing with unsteady footsteps and outstretched hands. He had once been a tall and powerful man, but had apparently been wasted by suffering and then bloated by drink. There were blotches of red on his heavy forehead, his eyes were bloodshot, and his long dark hair hung down in tangled masses. As he

staggered forward, trying to balance himself like a tight-rope walker by means of his hands, he nearly tripped over his hat, which lay on the ground; but came on again, leering at the two ladies and talking in the most idiotic way.

‘Advance another step if you dare, Clague,’ said Diana, waving him back with a haughty gesture.

They made a strange picture, this beautiful woman never more magnificent than when thoroughly roused, the pretty timid girl clinging to her, and the wretched creature cowering before her anger. They were close to a ruined windmill, which Clague and Macdonald must have passed on the night of the latter’s death; the country, brown and cold on this clear December day, was spread out before them in gentle undulations, sweeping gradually

upwards to the row of mountains in the background ; and, over towards Poolvash, there was a glint of the sea.

Diana had a way of becoming the central object in any scene she happened to be placed in ; all things seemed to group themselves around her. And now Cronkny-Irey-lhaa and Barrule might have been the seats in a vast amphitheatre, in which she was enacting the part of some wrathful goddess.

For one moment Clague stood trembling before her. Then he turned to get back to the stile, but in doing so fell in a heap on the road.

‘ Oh, Diana, he’s hurt,’ cried Nessie.

‘ Hurt ! What if he is ? Serve him right, the beast. But come, dear,’ she added, taking Nessie’s hand, ‘ you are frightened. We will go back to the town.’

‘ But I’m sure he is hurt, Diana. Please let me speak to him first.’

‘ No, Nessie, stay where you are.’ Then she walked up to the heap on the road and asked : ‘ Are you hurt, Clague ?’ Getting no answer, she bent over him and found him to be fast asleep, snoring.

‘ That thing there,’ said Diana, as she and Nessie walked back together, ‘ was once a man. It had influence, reputation, excellent prospects, an iron will, money, friends, a good mother, and a devoted sweetheart. But all its hopes and ambitions were centred in one of these, money, and when that was snatched away, it lost everything. Only one object in life remained to it—revenge. Whether or not that was accomplished none can say with certainty, but we do know that its victim met with a violent death. Though acquitted by the Court, it was universally

shunned ; friends tried to get it to go elsewhere ; but no, it would linger about the old haunts with their memories of what might have been. It had nothing to live for and none to associate with, so what could you expect ? The same dogged obstinacy that had carried it up hill, now carried it down. Frequenting the lowest public-houses, where other things almost as base as itself would speak to it for the sake of a drink, it sank with inconceivable rapidity until it has become what you see. I sometimes wonder whether demoniacal possession still exists ; if so, I should say ——But you look surprised, Nessie. Ah, well, you have not often seen me serious. Why have I told you all this, which you probably know ? Because, with such an example before me of what a desolate man may become, I'm not likely to turn against Frank.'

‘But, Diana,’ exclaimed Nessie, quite shocked, ‘you would never, never compare him——’

‘No, dear, I wasn’t comparing anybody. I was only taking an extreme case to illustrate my meaning. Do you think I blame Frank for what is entirely my own fault? It would be too dreadful to name him in the same breath with that thing yonder. Good gracious, Nessie, here’s this unfortunate girl coming to look after him, I do believe.’

It was Ruth Teare who had occasioned this last remark. She tried to smile as she came up, but there was a very sad and anxious look in her careworn face.

‘If you please, Mrs. Maddrell,’ she said, ‘have you seen that poor fellow Dick Clague anywhere up the road.’

‘Come back with us, Ruth,’ said Diana, gently, ‘that’s a good girl. If he is any-

where about, we'll send a man to search for him—if you wish to see him,' added she, with the intention of ignoring the state she knew he was in. 'But your father would scarcely like you to be going after him.'

'He's just left the house,' said Ruth, colouring, 'so I slipped out too, for I saw Dick go past some time back, and I thought—he didn't look well.'

'We'll see he is properly attended to.'

'Thank you, ma'am, kindly. And oh,' cried Ruth, throwing aside all pretence with a sudden burst of tears, 'it's not his fault; don't think that of him; it's them that drove him to it that should be blamed. They won't speak to him, not a soul in the town, though he's as innocent of what they say as I am.'

They left her at the door of her own home, and, seeing a man who appeared to

have nothing particular to do, sent him to take charge of Clague.

Now that the spirit of benevolence was upon her—and, thank goodness, it is a spirit as infectious, as exhilarating and as powerful as any other with opposite tendencies—Diana abandoned herself to it with something like a sense of luxury : all the more readily because she carried in her breast the sting of Frank's letter, coldly refusing to see her. Perhaps nothing had ever pained her more ; yet it had not turned her against him, she loved him too dearly for that. She accepted it as part of her punishment, and became only the more determined to win his love in return. And now, with Nessie on her side, she felt at peace with all the world.

‘Your father,’ she said, as they entered the market-place from which the soldiers had departed, ‘may be too old for work,

and Georgie too young; but if there is anything they would like to do—anything for which capital is required, remember, Nessie, I have far more money than I want, and it is heartily at their service. They could pay me interest, you know, so it would be a good thing for me and might benefit them.'

'You are exceedingly good,' said Nessie. And then a sudden thought struck her, and she turned her hazel eyes on Diana, who, strangely enough, could not meet their gaze. 'Diana,' she said, gravely, 'you sent my mother a hundred pounds. No, don't deny it. I feel quite, quite sure you did. Oh! but it was very wrong of you.'

'Nessie,' said Diana, 'you are talking nonsense. Good-bye, dear. I want to speak to the High Bailiff.' And she glided swiftly away.

As Nessie walked thoughtfully along by the glaxis on her way towards Claddagh House, she happened to turn her head and saw Diana laughing with a party of old gentlemen whom she had just joined. Her lovely face was as bright as a summer sky ; it was almost impossible to believe that a cloud had ever passed over it. But when she noticed Nessie looking in that direction, she beckoned and went towards her.

‘ One word more, dear,’ she said. ‘ If ever you are inclined to think of me as a frivolous thing, remember you have seen me serious. If ever you hear of what people call my wild pranks, remember I have only one object at heart. You know what that is. Please, don’t condemn the method until you see the result. Good-bye again, Nessie.’ And back she went to flirt with the High Bailiff and half-a-dozen more.

Nessie walked homewards, thinking what a strange creature Diana was. She did not understand her new ally and probably never would ; but, partly for that reason, she felt strongly attracted towards her, and trusted her most implicitly. She was also hopeful that, between them, they would set Frank on his legs, in the only position in which he could possibly stand. It was a happy thought for the girl who loved him : a thought that brought a smile to her pale face and filled her eyes with a soft and tender light, such as may be seen in the eyes of those who are thinking of distant yet happy friends. And yet, while she reproached herself for her selfishness, she could not but feel a pang at the idea of an eternal separation from Frank, which, to her mind, would take a more definite and irremediable form when husband and wife were united.

Her reflections were interrupted by Sammy Kneale, who was standing by the side of the drawbridge.

‘Heard the latest, Nessie?’ he inquired.

‘Queen Anne dead, Sammy?’ she replied, with a smile. ‘That’s your usual news.’

He looked at her with his crooked nose at its severest angle. Like most wags, Sammy was always painfully affected by the suspicion of a joke directed against himself.

‘No,’ he said, solemnly, ‘something much more peculiar. Haven’t you heard Mrs. Maddrell’s singular story?’

‘Not that I know of.’

‘Really, though.’

‘Yes, really.’

‘Now, that’s curious,’ said Sammy, who had assumed an air of great importance

and desired to make the most of his information.

‘If you don’t tell me at once,’ said Nessie, ‘I must go, for I have been away from home all morning.’

‘Well, it is just this,’ said Sammy, with resignation; and then proceeded to tell her Diana’s accusation against herself.

Nessie listened in silence, with the poke-bonnet bent down so that he should not see her face. When he had finished, she said, quietly:

‘Good-bye, Sammy. I must be going home now.’

He looked after her with surprise and disappointment. Though undoubtedly the best story that he had ever got hold of, it seemed to have missed fire, a most grievous thing, which he went into his office to brood over.

It had not entirely missed fire, however,

for it had disturbed Nessie's belief in her friend. Nothing more painful could have happened to her under the circumstances. She clung desperately to Diana's last words, 'Don't condemn the method until you see the result;' and yet how could this have anything to do with what had taken place before the marriage? Sammy must have made some grave mistake; he was always ready to catch at any straw and magnify it into a beam of extraordinary dimensions. But he said he had had it from Diana's own lips! And if she would deceive Frank then, what would she not do at any other time? Nessie shuddered. It was a dreadful shock to her simple faith in those around her. Judging others by her own standard, she had been surrounded by a world as pure and innocent as herself; and now there had fallen into it this lurid flash to open her eyes. But no, it was

only a mistake of that silly fellow, Sammy Kneale.

Nessie found two visitors at Claddagh House. One was Dalrymple, who had airily informed Mrs. Colquitt that he had come to pay a morning call. The other was Ned, who had blundered in shortly afterwards to make the same announcement. Both had been received with a certain scepticism, manifested in a smile on the ruddy face of their hostess, and each had shown some surprise at seeing the other. But, while Dalrymple could scarcely have been more at ease in his own quarters, Ned was decidedly nervous and uncomfortable.

At Nessie's entrance he became more awkward than ever. Was he not going to ask her to marry him? And how could he forget that autumn evening when, in the prettiest way in the world, she had said to

him, 'Oh, but it would be a strange thing for us to think of marriage?' The arguments which had looked so perfect a short time ago, now wore a distressingly seedy aspect. How could he persuade her that he was pleading, not for himself alone, but for everybody concerned? It had seemed easy enough while he was still at a distance from it, but now that he had come close to it, lo! it rose up before him like a mighty fence defying the most daring leap.

'Mrs. Colquitt,' said Dalrymple, after a careful scrutiny of Ned, who was getting quite desperate and looked it, 'will you show me the garden?'

'In the dead of winter!'

'If you please. I can see dozens of gardens in summer, but not one in winter. I am anxious to see how cabbages and potatoes look when they scent frost.'

‘But there are none.’

‘Oh, no, of course, I know that,’ said Dalrymple, in his careless way. ‘I was referring to the place where they grow. You see, I take a sort of philosophical interest in potatoes, they are so like ourselves, all hanging together in families. For that reason, they are worth studying, though I would far rather be a mushroom—push my head above the ground one sunny morning and look round with delighted surprise at the beautiful world in which I found myself, and then be cut down without any other mushroom caring twopence about me. If only men and women grew on stalks—each on his or her own, you know—it would save a lot of trouble. But won’t you come into the garden, Mrs. Colquitt? We can discuss these problems much better there.’

‘Come along, then,’ she replied, with a pleased yet puzzled look at him.

And so Ned and Nessie were left alone.

CHAPTER X.

TRUMPS.

‘NESSIE, will you marry me?’

‘Oh, Ned!’ she exclaimed, with a look of gentle reproof.

‘No, don’t misunderstand me. I don’t ask you to love me—because—because,’ said Ned, sadly, ‘you can’t.’ He surveyed his own awkward person as he added: ‘And I don’t wonder at it, I’m so very different from you in every way. You like me as a brother and I must be content with that. Perhaps my great love for you will be enough for both.’

‘But, my dear good kind friend, what did you say only last night?’

‘Oh, I remember very well,’ answered Ned, wisely shaking his head. ‘I’m not likely to forget anything I ever said to you, or you ever said to me. I’m a bad hand at an explanation, but I’m getting at it by degrees. Will you marry me for Frank’s sake, Nessie? There, that’s what I mean.’

‘For Frank’s sake!’ said Nessie, with a little shiver.

‘Yes,’ said Ned, taking her hand, ‘and I shall do my best to make you happy, and I shall be more than happy myself, and all will be well.’

He meant that he would then be in a position to help her family without fear of giving offence. But while wishing to show he would not neglect them he strongly objected to anything like an attempt at bribery, and so slurred it over.

‘But Frank!’

‘Don’t you see, Nessie, he is waiting and waiting, hoping something will turn up to set him free, and he’ll continue to wait as long as you are unmarried. I explained it all to him, and he would be glad to see you happy with some one who can take proper care of you. At least,’ added Ned, with excessive candour, ‘that’s what I understood from his words. If you still don’t care enough about me—oh, Nessie, can’t you love me a little, just a little?—but, if you can’t, we must try to get on in the old way as best we can.’

Nessie’s chief idea being to help Frank out of the difficulties for which she assumed a large share of the responsibility, Ned had certainly a strong case. But every inch of standing-room was suddenly cut from beneath his feet.

‘You don’t know how you distress me,’

she said. 'You make me tell you what must pain you. Oh, how can I answer you softly? You dear old Ned, a marriage ought not to be made for the convenience of friends, no matter how dear they may be; it is not a business contract; there must be something else.' She paused and looked at him pitifully.

'I understand,' he said, meekly.

He rose and took up his hat.

'Are you vexed with me, Ned?' she asked, raising her tear-filled eyes to his face, which was dark and troubled.

'I should be a brute if I were. You have set me right, where I was blundering. If you had given me any other reason, I should have tried to argue with you, but now I thank you. Good-bye, Nessie.'

Toby was waiting at the gate, with his face set towards the town. But Ned, anxious to escape from curious friends,

started at a rapid pace in the opposite direction.

‘We have caught it in earnest now, Toby,’ said Ned, ‘straight from the shoulder—and we can never, never come up to time again. There was I, stupid old Ned Christorey, trying to tempt the sweetest and purest and dearest girl in the world—but she resisted me, for which I love her more than ever—and it’s all over. Heigh-ho, Toby! What will they say at home?’

Taking the shore road, Ned went past a row of cottages facing the sea, with here and there a fisherman smoking in his doorway. But at the top of Hango Hill, seeing somebody coming, he turned into the little field enclosing the semi-circular mound on which stands the old grey ruin. Even then the crumbling walls were on the very edge of the cliff, which is composed of soft earth descending almost perpendicularly

to the shingly beach. There is never a fall of rain but carries some of it away, and never a high tide but the hungry sea takes a great bite at the spot where Illiam Dhone met a traitor's death.

Not wishing to be seen, Ned was about to hide within the ruin, when his attention was arrested by what struck him as a singular phenomenon. It was a boot, heel uppermost and sole pointing seawards, on the face of the cliff. What prevented its falling? The heavy part being completely in the air, it seemed able to preserve its equilibrium in defiance of all natural laws. After studying it for a few moments, Ned threw a pebble at it, and, though he missed it, he felt sure that it moved. Toby was clearly of the same opinion, for he entered a loud protest against this extravagant conduct of a piece of leather.

As master and dog peered down in

amazement, all doubt was set at rest. After a violent agitation of the boot, a leg came into view; then another boot and another leg; then a wizened little body; and finally a bald head with a patch of white hair over each ear. When the bald head had been decently covered with a hat and the feet firmly planted in the earth, a wrinkled old face looked up inquiringly and somewhat fearfully.

‘Mr. Colquitt!’ exclaimed Ned.

‘Oh, it’s only you, Ned,’ he said; and began to scramble up the cliff.

It appeared that he had crawled out of an old drain, which was invisible from the spot where Ned had stood. He carried a small trowel in one hand and a long thin brownish object in the other; and, when he arrived at the top, he flourished the latter triumphantly at Ned.

‘What is it?’ asked Ned.

‘A human femur.’

‘Oh!’ said Ned, falling back a bit.

‘It can’t very well have belonged to Illiam Dhone,’ said Mr. Colquitt, with regret, ‘for he was buried at Malew, but I don’t see why I shouldn’t label it as his. Do you?’

‘Well, yes. If it’s not his, it’s not his.’

‘But a relic must have some name attached to it, the bigger the better. I must think it over. There have been a good many persons buried here at one time or another, most of them executed for some political offence.’

‘You have been studying Manx history, Mr. Colquitt.’

‘No; Dalrymple has been telling me all about it. What a capital fellow he is, to be sure! He says Hango Hill is crammed full of bones—a grand place to dig about in. So I trotted up here this morning, and this,

you see,' said Mr. Colquitt, proudly holding up his prize, 'is the first result, the femur of a malefactor !'

'You won't show it to your wife?' inquired Ned, with some alarm.

Mr. Colquitt winked.

It would be as well, thought Ned, to give Dalrymple a friendly warning. With the best possible intentions, here he was unwittingly encouraging the husband to do what would offend the wife. Indeed, he seemed to have an unfortunate knack of setting the two by the ears. The toad incident had led to no end of wrangling, and something of the sort was always cropping up. No one could have been more surprised at the effects of his good-nature than Dalrymple himself; yet as surely as he attempted to please Mr. Colquitt, whose tastes invariably clashed with those of his wife, he provoked disaster. A little

kind advice would remedy all this. When his mistake was pointed out to him, he would exercise more discretion. Ned, remembering how he was received by his father at night, felt that in this way he could do something towards lightening Nessie's burden before her home became intolerable.

He returned with Mr. Colquitt as far as the gate of Claddagh House, when he joined Dalrymple who was just coming out. Mrs. Colquitt and Mona were also standing there. The former had been pressing her visitor to stay to lunch, and it was not until he saw the advancing couple that he actually declined; greatly to the relief of Mona, who knew that the larder contained nothing but some scraggy mutton.

Dalrymple's first look at his companion, as they walked on side by side, was painfully searching. It brought Ned back to

his own trouble just as if he had been led by bit and bridle. The blood rushed to his face, his eyes fell, his hands became a grievous annoyance, and the feeling that he was, and could not help, betraying his secret, added greatly to his embarrassment. After noting these symptoms, Dalrymple suddenly withdrew his gaze and produced his snuff-box, from which he helped himself so largely as to bring on a fit of sneezing.

It was highly amusing to watch Toby at this juncture. Instead of following at his master's heels, he had taken to the middle of the road, where he walked along by himself. Whether or not there is a doggy proverb to the effect that 'birds of a feather flock together,' he evidently did not wish to appear connected with that couple over the way; and yet could not resist a sidelong glance at them occasion-

ally. But, when Dalrymple sneezed, he so far forgot himself as to make a flank movement in case this extraordinary explosion should be the preliminary to an attack on Ned. Perceiving his mistake, he attentively regarded a stone as if that had been the cause of his digression; and walked on again as before.

‘Well,’ said Dalrymple, ‘have you done what I advised?’

‘Yes,’ answered Ned, too honest to equivocate; ‘it’s no use.’

‘You can’t mean that you’ve been refused!’

‘I do indeed.’

‘Refused! Good gracious! who would have thought it? My dear fellow, I can’t tell you how sorry I am for you.’

‘But,’ interrupted Ned, who shrank—he scarcely knew why—from the other’s sympathy in this matter, ‘I wish to speak

of something else now.' After apologising for venturing to offer advice, he went on to caution Dalrymple about his behaviour towards Mr. and Mrs. Colquitt. 'You're almost the only friend left to them,' he said, in conclusion, 'and it's very good of you to be so often there when they would be lonely without somebody to talk to. But if you tried to get Mr. Colquitt to leave his bones and beetles and insects alone, instead of helping him to get fresh ones, I think it would be better. You don't mind me saying so, do you? You see, I know the family better than you do, for I've been acquainted with them all my life, and I'm only telling you what I should have liked to be told myself had I been in your place.'

Dalrymple looked at Ned with rather a puzzled air. He appeared doubtful as to whether his companion was in earnest or

merely playing a part. In spite of his humble opinion of Ned, the latter hypothesis seemed not unlikely to the man who had spent his life in acting, and for a moment his habitual listlessness gave way to admiration. But, as he watched and listened, the conviction grew upon him that every word was spoken with perfect sincerity, and, yielding to an uncontrollable impulse, he burst out laughing.

‘Mr. Colquitt is very funny,’ he said in explanation to Ned, who was naturally astonished. ‘Upon my word, he’s very funny. I little thought, when I first came to the island, that I should find so much genuine amusement here. But I’ll remember what you say, and I thank you for having said it, for it was a most friendly thing to do. You shall have no occasion to blame me in the future; I’ll be wonderfully discreet. What do you say to a raid

on Claddagh House to carry off all the butterflies?’

‘No,’ said Ned, gravely, ‘I don’t think that would do at all. Hallo, Frank!’

But Frank who was standing at his office door, made no answer: he merely stared before him as if he did not see the couple who were passing. Dalrymple’s lip curled; he and Frank had never spoken to one another since the night of Jacob’s fish dinner.

‘Your friend,’ he said, carelessly, ‘seems rather out of sorts.’

‘Excuse me, will you, Dalrymple?’ said Ned, and hurried back.

When Frank saw him approaching, he entered his office and closed the door. Pained beyond measure, Ned followed and found him sitting at the table, from which he scarcely even looked up.

‘Is there anything the matter, Frank?’ asked Ned, anxiously.

‘Not that I know of,’ coldly replied Frank.

‘But—aren’t you offended about something?’

‘Offended! Oh dear, no.’

Ned considered. After a pause he tried this bait:

‘I have something important to tell you.’

‘Indeed!’ said Frank, turning over the pages of a book. ‘Why don’t you go after your new friend?’

‘But he’s a thoroughly good fellow,’ said Ned, panting a little from the effects of the unexpected blow, ‘when you come to know him. He is indeed, Frank, I assure you. We have all been deceived about him.’

‘And you,’ said Frank, scornfully, ‘have come to set us all right.’

It would be difficult to say whether

bewilderment or distress was the more plainly written on Ned's face. Could this be Frank, the kind friend who had always been so lenient to his faults? What had caused this painful change? Merely a walk with Dalrymple? That would be a strange and indeed an incredible thing. And yet, if it had nothing to do with the grievance, why had it been thrust in his teeth?

‘But, Frank, don't judge him harshly. I'm quite sure he would gladly forget his misunderstanding with you. Will you allow me to put in a word?’

‘Thank you, no.’

‘He is a good friend to the Colquitts, a good friend to Nessie, and therefore to you and me. Why, he even told me it would be a good thing for all if I were married to her.’

‘Indeed!’ said Frank.

His face had suddenly become so black that Ned, dimly perceiving the real grievance lay here, hastened to add :

‘ And I have asked her—and she has refused me—and it’s all over, Frank.’

‘ As he had foreseen.’

‘ You wrong him, Frank ; you do, indeed. You never saw a man more surprised than he was when I told him.’

‘ Great heavens !’ cried Frank, springing passionately to his feet. ‘ And you make this man the confidant of your private conversations with Nessie ! You bring him into such close relationship with her as that ! Are you mad, Ned ? or, do you mean to insult her ?’

Ned looked at Frank in silent dismay. After a pause he said, sadly :

‘ I won’t answer your questions at present, Frank ; to-morrow, perhaps, we shall both be better able to do justice

to the subject.' And he left the office.

As regards matter of fact, Frank was right and Ned was wrong; yet Frank was afterwards ashamed of himself, while Ned was ashamed of his friend. Ned, however, raked up all manner of excuses for him, and there was no lack of them ready to his hand, Frank's position being such as would sour the temper of most men.

If the incident had stopped here no great harm would have been done, but it was the beginning of a breach between the two friends which widened daily, and, as Ned was deeply grieved to see, tended more effectually to isolate the Colquitts. As he walked homewards to tell his father and mother of his lamentable failure, he felt sure this would be the case. It seemed to him that everything was going wrong, and that all his efforts to mend matters only made them worse.

Though the belief of a good man in the goodness of the world be a grievous error, it is surely better to look through that man's glasses than through those of the dyspeptic cynic who walks from Dan to Beersheba and, to the distress of all he meets, cries: 'All's barren.' We see men's souls, not as they are, but as reflected in our own; he, therefore, that sweepingly condemns others, condemns himself, a mirror that shows none but ugly images being obviously at fault. While Ned was greatly mistaken about his new friend, his view was one that many with keener sight might envy. Moreover, it tended to verify itself, for it could not but react upon Dalrymple, who was as little qualified by nature to be a thoroughly bad man as he was qualified to be a thoroughly good one.

When deserted by Ned, he went back to his quarters in the barracks, where he

found Captain Nugent smoking and reading in front of the fire. He took the easy-chair opposite.

‘Nugent,’ he said, ‘when your opponent holds a strong hand of trumps, what do you do?’

‘Force him,’ replied Nugent, with some surprise.

‘In other words, make him play his trumps prematurely, so that you may canter in alone at the finish?’

‘Just so.’

‘Is whist—Snuff? No. Then I’ll help myself. Is whist an exponent of Christian principles?’

‘Well,’ laughed Nugent, ‘it demonstrates more truths than many a sermon.’

‘Legitimate truths?’

‘Yes, surely.’

‘I’m glad to hear it,’ said Dalrymple with a yawn. He lay back in his chair

and folded his arms as if there was nothing more to be said.

Nugent slowly blew a cloud of smoke and looked through it curiously. As his friend still remained silent, he fell to inspecting the ash of his cigar, then took up his book, and finally laid it down again.

‘You odd fellow,’ he said, ‘what are you driving at? Have you been playing whist in the morning?’

‘Yes, with Ned Christorey.’

‘Ah!’

‘Forced him to propose.’

‘When you felt sure he would be refused?’

‘Precisely. And he has been refused and now I stand alone. Will you,’ asked Dalrymple, with a smile which he hurriedly transferred from his friend to the fire, ‘be my best man?’

He did not appear very well satisfied with himself; and Nugent, after regarding him in silence for a moment or two, went on with his reading.

Dalrymple had got into this dilemma. Owing to an antipathy between himself and Frank, he had taken a morbid pleasure in irritating the latter. In order to gratify it, he had attempted to oust Frank from Nessie's favour and take his place. But when a separation was actually effected—by an accident, so far as he was concerned—he found himself unable to retreat to his original position as he had intended, for he had fallen in love with the girl with whom he had thought he was only amusing himself. The truth came upon him as a surprise; he made a faint struggle against it at first, and so tightened his bonds. By itself it would have been no great misfortune, though he had hitherto been very

careful to keep clear of any entanglement of the sort. But the rival whom he had disliked had been replaced by another whom he had come to like and respect, and who liked, and, as he admitted with a twinge, respected him in return; so he was compelled either to abandon the object upon which his heart was set or else to plot and scheme against an honest, simple, good-hearted fellow like Ned Christorey. It was not without a sense of humiliation that he had adopted the latter alternative. Anxious to secure himself, he endeavoured to ignore Ned, and pretended that he was really working in Nessie's interests against Frank.

‘ You see, Nugent,’ he said, after a lengthy silence, ‘ I thought it better to get Christorey out of the way, because he was never really in the hunt. The choleric islander has taken to playing the dog in the manger,

and it is with him that matters must be settled.'

'How?'

'Well, he must be driven to declare himself. When people see that he is binding Miss Nessie down to a life of solitary misery, he will be forced to hide his diminished head.'

'As a friend,' said Nugent, quietly, 'I should advise you to leave Maddrell alone. He is not a fellow to be trifled with.'

Dalrymple laughed.

'He has often heard my opinion of him,' he said, 'and of the Manx generally. Perhaps, he would like to see what was said of the island a couple of centuries ago. I copied this,' added he, producing a slip of paper and handing it to Nugent, 'out of a scrap-book at the Colquitts, and I intend to send it to the choleric islander with my

compliments. What do you think of it?’

Nugent read as follows :

‘ When Sathane tryed his arts in vaine,
Ye worship of ye Lorde toe gaine,
Ye yird, he said, and all be thine,
Except ane space, that maun be mine :
Though bare it is, and scarce a span,
By mortals called ye Ysle of Mann,
This is a place I cannot spare,
For all my choicest friends are there.’

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE ROAD TO A DANCE.

ONE of the most influential men in the town was Mr. Watterson, H.K. and C.P. (Member of the House of Keys, and Captain of the Parish). He had a wife and two daughters, Ada and Jennie, and lived at Scarlett, in an old-fashioned house with grassy terraces looking upon the bay, trees on either side, and a good garden behind. It was approached by the road which skirted the beach and dropped suddenly upon it, there being no protect-

ing wall as in front of Claddagh House. It was a pleasant place in summer when the tide was high, but a very desolate place in winter when the wail of the sea came across a long bleak stretch of rocks and the wind went by like the blast of a mighty trumpet.

On Christmas Eve there was to be a dance at the Wattersons.' All their acquaintances were invited with the exception of the Colquitts, for whom Jennie, a mischievous little elf, once Nessie's particular friend, had pleaded hard, but in vain. Mrs. Sherwood not being very well, as was her custom during the cold months, Diana declined the invitation and said so publicly ; whereupon Frank, urged by his uncle, accepted.

Now, while there cannot be a more artful creature than a woman in love, the difficulties by which Diana was surrounded

were peculiarly suited to calling forth all her resources. By hook or by crook she had determined to meet Frank face to face, and then if she could not bring him under her sway, wedded to her as he was, she was not what she thought herself to be. So she had declined the invitation in the hope that Frank might accept; and when she heard that he had accepted, she went privately to Mrs. Watterson and said she had changed her mind. Her next proceeding will be readily guessed. She devised a costume which would compel admiration from every man present and set every woman gnashing her teeth in despair.

When Christmas Eve arrived, there was a great bustle in the town. Conveyances of every sort went flashing through the market-place, many returning to fetch one party after another; sedan-chairs jogged

along more slowly : and more slowly still primold dames picking their way in pattens, their maids dangling lanterns in front. Everybody seemed to be going in the direction of Scarlett ; for, besides the guests, there was a motley throng to see the fine dresses of the ladies as they entered the house.

Though it was a very dark night with a keen breeze, Diana had decided to walk ; for a sufficient reason—to get a becoming colour into her cheeks which had been growing very pale. Moreover, she had to walk alone, for she had given her servants leave to attend the Oiel Verree at Malew, a late service after the conclusion of which it was customary for ancient men to get up one by one and sing carols, like superannuated gamecocks trying to crow one another down, and for maidens to pelt their lovers with handfuls of parched peas.

However, Diana was not the sort of woman to need an escort; she was quite free from superstition, and had never yet met the living thing that could make her quake.

Unpunctuality is said to be a feminine failing. This may be so, but it is often the result of policy. How can an effective costume be better displayed than by the late arrival of its wearer and the consequent disturbance of the more punctual guests? Besides, it is not so easy to calculate to a minute how long it will take to arrange this effective costume. A dress cannot be shovelled on like a swallow-tail coat; there are many little touches which can only be done at the last moment. And Diana was not likely to omit any of them this evening.

Still, she had finished them all, smiled with satisfaction at the lovely woman in

the lovely setting who smiled back at her from the mirror, returned to the drawing-room to be praised by her mother, and sat there for a long time before she thought of starting. It would not do, she told herself, to close the door of the cage until she could feel reasonably sure that the bird was inside; if she were too hasty, she would only scare it away. So she waited until the last conveyance had returned and the last sound died away; then she wrapped herself up in her cloak and hood, and, carrying a lantern and a bag containing her white satin shoes and other necessities, set out for her lonely walk through the darkness. Surely Frank ought to be flattered when he heard of it!

Diana who had only about a quarter-of-a-mile to go, had nearly reached her destination when she recollected her bouquet. Though it had been continually in her

thoughts all day, she had left it behind on the drawing-room table. It was a most vexatious thing, for she had spent a great deal of trouble in getting the flowers and had set aside some of the best for Frank. With characteristic courage, she turned back to fetch them. But, before she had gone half way, an unfortunate accident befell her: she dropped her lantern, and, the light being extinguished, she was left in pitch darkness.

Nothing daunted, she continued her walk towards the town, which was perhaps the best course open to her. She had passed through a short narrow street leading out of the market-place by the corner of St. Mary's Chapel, and at the first of these cottages she could get her lantern relighted. Behind, she could see a blaze of light coming from the house where the guests were already assembled; in front, an

occasional flicker from the lighthouse on the pier; and on her right hand, a shadowy white line in the distance where the breakers were falling with a sullen roar upon the rocks. But these were mere clefts in a darkness so impenetrable that it enclosed her like a wall; and yet she hurried through it without hesitation, anxious only to get her bouquet and arrive at the dance as soon as possible.

But, of a sudden, her heart gave a wild throb, for she felt herself shooting headlong through the air—descending like lightning into some black gulf which had opened before her. For a moment all her sensations were suspended, and then with a painful crash they started into activity again. When she could in some measure collect her ideas, she found herself lying on the beach. It was some time before she had enough energy to get up. She

lay there too stunned to move, aching from head to foot, listening to the dull thunder of the waves and the rustle of the breeze as it stirred the seaweed on the rocks around.

When at length she rose, she thought more of her dress than of herself. Fortunately, she reflected, it was protected by a thick cloak and so might be uninjured, though no doubt sadly crumpled. She quite forgot that but for this same protection she might have been much more seriously hurt than she was. Gloves had saved her hands, and her hands, with the precious bag which they had never relinquished, had saved her face ; but how, she did not pause to think and could never afterwards tell. The lantern was completely shattered, yet in some wonderful way she had escaped with nothing worse than a few bruises.

Now that she could survey the matter more calmly, Diana was angry rather than frightened. It roused in her a fierce determination to surmount the obstacles that were strewn in her path. Though the Fates themselves were fighting against her, she would meet the man she loved. She would go to this dance—nothing on earth should prevent her—and she would make him proud of her, if not because she was beautiful, at least because she was the best dressed woman there.

Arrived at this decision, she set about carrying it into effect. Finding it impossible to clamber back into the road, she began to grope her way along the beach; an exceedingly difficult task at night, for the limestone layers were broken off so as to form an irregular series of steps covered with slippery seaweed and patches of loose stones. With all her care she had more

than one tumble, though none nearly so bad as the first.

After a time she came to a great black object which made her hesitate. It lay quite still and motionless—crouching, it almost seemed—and, even if it were not some marine monster, it certainly had an uncanny look. But, resolutely conquering her weakness, Diana advanced and, not without a tremor, laid her hand upon it. It was merely a boat lying keel uppermost. At this discovery she laughed. It was undoubtedly a great relief to have some excuse for using her voice; but how strange that laughter sounded on the desolate shore with the sea sending back its sullen answer through the darkness!

Feeling her way round the boat, Diana went on again until she arrived at a much more formidable obstacle—a black gulf on the very brink of which she was standing

when she perceived it. It had once been used as a sawpit, and, though of considerable depth, was only five or six feet in breadth. At the present time, there is not a trace of it left; indeed, all that part of the coast has been much altered.

The road prevented Diana's passing at one end, and a confusion of rocks and sea prevented her passing at the other. Her progress seemed to have come to a full stop. However a resolute and fearless woman is not easily beaten, and though many considered Diana merely a frivolous coquette, she had more than once proved that she was made of very different fibre, but never more conclusively than she did now.

After listening in vain for the sound of a footstep, she tested the edges of the pit, and, finding them firm, decided to jump it, or, at least, to try. Though six feet can

scarcely be called a leap for an athletic young man, it may be doubted whether many encumbered by cloak and ball-dress would care to undertake it in broad daylight ; but six feet into black space is quite another matter—so much has to be taken upon trust that even the athletic young man might be excused for shirking it. However, it was the only way by which Diana could gain her end, and in sheer desperation she prepared to make the attempt.

Though she had already pinned up her skirts, she thought it better to go a little further in the same direction. Half-a-dozen yards of dry level rock gave her plenty of room for a run, and the task of investigating it kept up her spirits. When all her preparations were completed, she hesitated for the first time : stood at her post panting a little, with her hands clasped

and her head thrown back in a listening attitude, hoping that somebody might come to her assistance after all.

What would those merry dancers have thought of her had they seen her now? What did she think of herself, as there arose before her the picture of a beautiful woman entering a crowded ball-room, every eye noticing how superbly she was dressed, and then a rush of admirers to overwhelm her with compliments, which, if sweet in themselves, would be far, far sweeter if they brought her nearer her object? How different from the present reality! Here was a desperate woman standing on a bleak and lonely shore, preparing to take a wild leap in the dark! Was it not something like that other leap—the leap into married life with a man who loved her not? This thought gave a new significance to her undertaking: for, as we

have already seen, she had a way of looking for some sign in reference to the future, and, it must be added, of rejecting it if unsatisfactory.

With sudden energy she grasped her bag more tightly—the broken lantern had been discarded—and started forward at a run. At first she shut her eyes, but soon opened them again, her greatest fear being of falling into the pit without seeing it. But as she approached she caught its outline, and a brief weakness overpowered her. She faltered; almost stopped; then rushed at it; and, planting her foot firmly on the brink, sprang forward into the night.

It was, Diana used to say, a horrible sensation flying through the darkness, wondering what was going to happen next; but it may be doubted whether she had time to think at all until it was all over. She alighted a considerable distance beyond

the further edge of the pit, and, though she stumbled backwards, managed to struggle to her feet without mishap.

It was with a strange sense of elation that, after pausing to regain her breath, she resumed her scramble along the rocks. She was conquering her difficulties bravely, and by so doing seemed to be clearing the path towards the goal on which she had set her heart. This last success was full of promise for the future. She made light of an occasional slip now, and the way became easier as she went on. But there was yet another adventure awaiting her.

She had reached the end of the street and was on the point of trying to scramble into it near an old well, when a groan close by brought her to an involuntary halt. As she stood there listening, startled at the unexpected sound, she heard it again and felt sure it proceeded from somebody

in pain. After some groping about, she discovered a man who appeared to have fallen, like herself, upon the beach. His speech was incoherent and his name was Clague, which will sufficiently explain his position and manner of reaching it. Whether or not he was badly injured she could not ascertain, but one thing was certain—she must fetch assistance.

Strangely enough, though Clague had sunk to very nearly the lowest level of humanity, he seemed to Diana to be a slight link between herself and Frank. While Frank had defended him at the trial and perhaps saved his life, she had tried to guard him from moral ruin, and, after befriending him on another occasion, had now perhaps also saved his life. Was there not design in all this? Might it not be a means to some end as yet unrevealed to her? Though Diana would hardly have

liked to confess it, she had some such idea in her head.

Seeing a cottage door opposite ajar, and hearing loud voices within, she called out.

The door was flung open; and, as a flood of light poured out upon the darkness, there rushed forth a troop of the most extraordinary creatures, most of them carrying swords in their hands, and all capering about and shouting. It was as if the inmates of a lunatic asylum had been turned loose after a fancy-dress ball. One was Prince Valentine of Turkey; another was St. George of England who had just been having a bloodthirsty encounter with the Prince; another was the King of Egypt who had interposed as mediator; another was the doctor who had bound up the wounds of the defeated hero and afterwards gone round with the hat—a very pro-

fessional thing to do ; another was Sambo a nigger who had improved the occasion with a few jokes ; and there were several more whose functions were limited to looking on. All were arrayed in grotesque costumes made of calico and decorated with strips of coloured paper, tinsel, and ribbons ; and their hats were about three feet high and pointed—rather cumbrous headgear for warriors. They were, in fact, the Whiteboys, and had been enacting from house to house their old Christmas play, a version of ‘St. George and the Dragon.’

Picture this strange company carrying the pitiable creature into the cottage, with Diana in her cloak and hood in attendance ! Clague, it appeared, was less hurt than incapable. So she requested them to take every care of him and to send for Dr. Mylworry if necessary. She would be responsible for any expense, she said, and,

if they called at her house in the morning, she would reward them for their trouble. At this speech the King of Egypt rejoiced exceedingly and called for three lusty cheers, which were given by all the kings and princes present amid a general raising of lofty hats. And so Diana went on her way.

When she got home she never said a word about what had happened, but merely explained that she had forgotten her bouquet. Another disaster was impossible, she told herself; in any case there was no need to alarm her mother, who was comfortably nursing her ailments and her Indian finery by the fire-side. Safe in her own room, she made a careful examination of her dress, and found the damage to be wonderfully slight. A few minutes sufficed to do all that was necessary. Then, provided with a fresh lantern, she again started

for the Wattersons', where she arrived without any further accident.

It was not until the following morning that Diana felt any ill-effects from her many tumbles; she could scarcely walk then, she was so stiff. But this evening as she passed through the hall and heard the music floating down to her, she was in a wild whirl of excitement, as if she had been a girl going to her first ball. This alone would have been sufficient to carry her through the programme which she had prepared. She did not miss a single dance after her arrival, and her partners said she had never danced better, had never been in higher spirits, and never appeared to greater advantage.

A square dance having just been concluded when she ascended to the ball-room, a few couples were pacing to and fro, others were sitting down, and many were

loitering about the stairs which were indifferently lighted. There were many pretty girls there; but mere prettiness could not hold a candle to Diana's surpassing beauty. As she proceeded, she drew all others after her like the luminous trail that follows the brilliant meteor. Curious to see how she would look beneath the glare of the lamps and candles, they were unconscious of the praise they were silently bestowing upon her, and the men were even more pronounced in their admiration.

As she stood in the doorway, with the light falling full upon her graceful figure and beautiful dress, a smile on her lovely face tinted by her exertions, there fell a silence upon all present. Then, as she had anticipated, there was a rush of partners eager to dance with her. She had soft words for everyone, but her eyes kept

wandering beyond them. Where was Frank for whom she had undertaken it all? She could not see him.

CHAPTER XII.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

ON Christmas morning a huge scroll, worked in ivy leaves and placed over the Communion-table in St. Mary's, announced the glad tidings of 'Peace on earth.' This was the subject of an eloquent sermon delivered, from a perfect bower at the top of the triple goblet, by the old chaplain, who addressed his hearers so directly as to unsettle many for the rest of the day. It was also implied in the general hand-shaking and exchange of good wishes after

the service. Yet how stood the facts? Black Deborah's announcement about the Millennium appeared scarcely less trustworthy.

Before descending to particulars, let us first take a general survey of the scene, though observation from a sitting posture was beset by many difficulties at Christmas. Heavy festoons of greenery, hanging down from the surrounding gallery, partly concealed those beneath it; immense arches erected at intervals along the aisle formed a still worse obstruction; but neither could be compared with the holly branches which grew out of the high backs of every pew. It was like sitting in a shrubbery. Sometimes through the prickly fence of brilliant green studded with red berries, there would peep a chubby little face with long curls and eyes wide-open with wondering awe; and then perhaps it would see

another face it knew, and beam with sudden delight, only to turn penitently to its mother who was shaking a warning finger. This was one of the many sights in the church, and perhaps the prettiest.

The windows afforded an illustration of the three degrees of comparison. If you looked out on one side, you saw the fire-lit houses around the market-place; if you looked out at the back, you saw the most miserable street in the town—that along which Diana had passed on the previous night; and if you looked on the other side, you saw the cheerless beach, and, away in the distance a ship tossing on a stormy sea.

But there was no need to go outside for contrasts. Here, in his blue-cushioned pew, slept Dr. Mylworry, dreaming of his greyhounds and chasing anew that artful old hare which had given him the slip near

the Creggans ; there, on scarlet cushions, sat the High Bailiff, nodding by his fire-side, and taking a reassuring pinch of snuff when he thought the sermon rather too pointed ; and yonder, on the bare benches at the back shivered the poor people, thinking less of the sermon than of the good dinner which those comfortable slumberers had provided for them. Not that this difference was any discredit to the clerical authorities, or indeed to anybody in particular ; it was solely the result of the system, the pews being the private property of individuals, and, as such, being sold by auction, rented, leased, and furnished as the tastes of their proprietors might ordain. The tastes of the poor are simple : they take what they can get, and are thankful. Hence, they sat on hard boards and worshipped with cold fingers, but with warm hearts very often.

It was a pleasant sight to see those dim old eyes brighten as the leathery clerk, with a sort of hovering note before he pounced upon the proper key, led off the singing. When any of the well-known Christmas hymns were sung, they seemed to be transported to another world, all their troubles being forgotten for the moment. It was as if they saw the gates ajar and got a brief glimpse of the strange and beautiful land within, where they would soon be happy all day long, singing the same old hymns, and, when they got tired, sitting in easy chairs like the High Bailiff. Their religion was a wonderful mixture, their heaven being but a glorified Castletown, constructed on a principle they made no attempt to understand, but were content to gaze at with awe-filled eyes from a distance. One old woman, bent double with rheumatism and nearly as deaf as a post, after-

wards expressed her feelings by saying that it had done her 'a power o' good.' No doubt, she had caught a faint murmur now and again, and who can say what bright vistas were thus opened to her! After all, in these days of elaborate ritual and advanced knowledge, are we very much wiser and happier?

The State pew at the end of the gallery was occupied by the Lieutenant-Governor and his family; the officers in uniform were on his left; behind was a line of soldiers extending half-way along on either hand.

When the soldiers rose, Bobby Beg was seen to be in his usual place, next the last man in the line. Bobby Beg had a fine military ardour. When the company was being manœuvred, he was always present if possible, and when it went out marching, he was sure to be in attendance, keeping perfect step, with his head up, chest thrown

out, arms rivetted to his sides—every bit the soldier, but for his carranes, shaggy brimless top-hat, and many coats which were all pockets and big buttons. And now, as he stood up in church, his attitude was far more military than that of the men by his side. What strange idea had Bobby Beg got into his muddled head? Was it merely the force of imitation? or, did he really fancy himself a scarlet-coated warrior? or did he think he might be taken for one? Whatever the cause, he looked the happiest person there. But when the singing commenced, he grew so excited that he chimed in with a verse or two of his interminable song about the king and himself, and then the surly old sexton came up and put him out. Poor Bobby Beg! that quite spoilt the flavour of his Christmas dinner. He ever afterwards declared that the sexton, when

he had 'collected' from the gallery and was on his way downstairs with the box, was in the habit of extracting the silver.

Bobby Beg, you see, could be quite as spiteful as Black Deborah, whose majestic figure clad as usual in the black mantle was a prominent feature in the centre of the church. Her tendencies being religious, she was a regular attendant at St. Mary's, though she did not think Mr. Hudson as orthodox as he might be. For example, she used to make certain 'Passover cakes,' and offer them for sale at an exorbitant price, and as he would not instruct his congregation that the purchase of these cakes was necessary to their salvation, she denounced him, on the authority of the Prophet Elijah, as an impostor, a wolf in sheep's clothing, and several other things. One other instance. She had a small printing-press which she worked herself.

By its means, she turned out the most extraordinary leaflets, invariably signed: 'Deborah the Prophetess, Isle of Man, otherwise Woman,' so stoutly did she uphold her sex. In one of them she minutely described an interview with Jacob who had met her in Malew churchyard in his shirt sleeves and told her he was a Manxman. But the leaflets, which were also for sale, fared no better than the cakes; much to her disgust, Mr. Hudson refused to recommend them as church literature. It was therefore rather as a spy that Black Deborah attended St. Mary's.

Notwithstanding the spasmodic festivities of the last few weeks—or perhaps partly in consequence of them—the majority of the congregation laboured under a sense of oppression. They could not but compare other Christmas Days with this one, on which many a family, then in comfortable

circumstances, was now struggling with poverty. The resources of all, indeed, had been heavily taxed, for those who had not suffered by the bank failure had contributed to help those who had. Besides this, they had a painful suspicion that their town harboured a murderer; how otherwise was Macdonald's death to be explained? And finally, there was the disagreeable affair in connection with Frank and his wife, which had split up a peaceful community into two factions.

While the town was divided against itself, it was unfortunately the same with several families, notably the Colquitts. Mrs. Colquitt, as we have seen, was incessantly nagging at her husband, and, goaded by poverty, had lately been leading him a very unpleasant life, her stories of sudden death having assumed a positively ghastly hue. Mona, wishing to settle

matters in her own way, had come into collision with her mother and sister. And Nessie, anxious to please everybody, found the task beyond her powers, harassed as she was not only by her own troubles and theirs, but also by the doubt which Sammy Kneale had raised in her mind about Diana. Moreover, she had insisted upon sending back the hundred pounds, though without saying from whom it had come, and this was another grievance.

In the Christorey family, also, matters were not running very smoothly. Though Mrs. Christorey had nothing but pity for the son whom Nessie would not marry, the major, who could by the light of events read something of Dalrymple's design, was highly indignant. Starting on the assumption that he had been possessed of this knowledge from the very commencement, he was uncommonly sarcastic with Ned for not

having seen a thing so absurdly obvious ; and, as Ned even then refused to credit it, stormed like a trooper, and went off to ease his mind by a wholesale distribution of Christmas presents among his tenants. Ned's troubles, however, did not end here ; for, Frank still continuing in the same unreasonable mood, there was cause to fear that the breach might become permanent.

Thus the occupants of two pews, at any rate, the Christoreys and the Colquitts, were sadly out of harmony with the occasion.

Diana exerted a more distracting influence than ever, her entrance having been waited for with the greatest interest. The Whiteboys had related how, amazed at the sight of a beautiful face looking at them from the darkness, and wondering whether Ben Varrey had actually come to them from her coral halls beneath the sea, they

had timidly gone down to the beach and found Diana standing by the prostrate figure of a man, to wit, Clague; to which had been added an account of finding her broken lantern on the far side of the saw-pit. On this foundation a good many wonderful stories had been raised, and there was a general anxiety to see the heroine of them. But the curious were doomed to disappointment, Diana being too stiff and sore and miserable to leave the house. More discouraged than she had ever been before, she doubted for the first time whether she had not set her heart on the attainment of an object which was beyond her reach.

The reader is really entitled to an apology for being taken to church to listen to a rambling discourse on secular matters. But, after all, the moral is the same as that which Mr. Hudson tried to hammer into

the heads of his congregation. Our characters are at sixes and sevens ; before we can hope to restore order among them, we must take stock of the situation. What better opportunity than the present ?

Diana's despondency was due to more than mere bodily ailments. She had suffered a crushing disappointment, all her trouble to meet Frank at the dance having been in vain. Dalrymple, who had previously annoyed him by means of some scurrilous verses about the island, had made a vexatious allusion to Mrs. Maddrell in her husband's hearing, and Frank, afraid of losing control of his temper, had left the Wattersons' shortly before Diana arrived.

On his way to church this morning he had heard some of the rumours which were afloat concerning her adventures. They

were very wide of the mark and much exaggerated, but he knew enough about her to get some idea of the truth. Had she not even maligned herself for his sake? and, though he had contradicted her self-accusations, there were some who still believed them. As he sat in his uncle's pew and thought over it all, he felt strangely softened towards the woman who bore him this great love. He had resisted the feeling as one likely to be dangerous, but it had proved too strong for him. If only he had not loved Nessie, he told himself, he could almost have loved Diana.

But it would give an unjust idea of Frank's mental condition if we were to leave him so, for he certainly was not at peace with his fellows. He was impatient with his uncle for not taking his part more actively; afraid to go near the Colquitts; unfriendly with Ned, and burning

with resentment against Dalrymple, who never lost a chance of worrying him.

And Jacob Maddrell, that fine old, pleasant-looking gentleman with the snowy beard, and talon-like nails? Sitting in one corner of his great square pew, as he looked over the fence of holly, he might have been taken for Father Christmas himself. While the lessons were being read, his pale-blue eyes never once strayed from the big Bible which had been his father's; during the prayers he always stood up, and, anxious not to inconvenience his neighbours the Christoreys by staring at them, prayed fervently into his hat. When the old clerk led off the singing, he joined in with his quavering voice; and, during the sermon, he listened apparently with the greatest attention. Yet his thoughts, too, were wandering at times. Though he afterwards

went about smilingly showering good wishes upon everybody, patting the children on the head, and telling them never, never, never to allow their long curls to be cut off, because no gift of man could compensate them for such a loss—a remark that he thought peculiarly appropriate to the season—he was grievously oppressed by Frank's troubles and his own. It was a weary time for him, this vacation, when there was no work for a willing advocate to do. His funds had sunk to a very low ebb; and had it not been for a magnificent hamper which Major Christorey, in the character of a grateful client, had sent him, his Christmas dinner would have been a poor one.

Much of the general discomfort had been caused by the tall, thin, handsome man in a scarlet coat, who sat at the Lieutenant-Governor's left hand, and looked down

upon the people below as if they had been so many earthworms. What were his reflections as he surveyed the result of his handiwork? Perhaps he did not think at all; some men do not, and so avoid seeing what might disturb their digestions. As Dalrymple was going to dine at Government House, this may have been his case. At all events, he slept soundly through the sermon. If, afterwards, there was a shade of dissatisfaction in his listless face, it may have been due to the annoyance of having to march with his men back to the barracks.

Many of the congregation stayed to the communion. But the Colquitts did not; they hurried away with scarcely a word to anybody. Dalrymple went after them, wished them the compliments of the season, and, being regarded as almost their only friend, was very warmly received. At no

time had they felt their isolation more than they did this morning; at no time had his kindness been more welcome. He had, indeed, made himself well-nigh indispensable to the family, he was so often at their house, though his attentions were chiefly confined to Mrs. Colquitt, who was consequently rather in a fog. She invited him to an early dinner with them, and he accepted, laughingly saying that he ought to be equal to two dinners on Christmas Day, especially when there would be four or five hours between. Then he went back to change his uniform.

While Dalrymple was crossing the drawbridge, Cain the Leg, beaming like the sun, stumped up to Jonathan Vondy who was standing alongside, gazing at the two or three vessels in the harbour, with bunches of holly hung from their mast-heads. The fishing-cutters were, of course,

laid up for the winter. They were lying in the mud above the stone-bridge: a row of black hulks, dismasted and weather-beaten, ranged along a waste stretch of ground which the Silverburn threaded and the sea claimed as its own at high tide.

‘Mornin’, Jonathan,’ said Cain the Leg, briskly.

‘Mornin’, boy,’ returned the old fossil, more deliberately.

‘A merry Chrisermas, Jonathan.’

‘Same to thee, boy.’

Exhausted by this conversational effort, they fell to gazing into the harbour. But presently Cain the Leg woke up again, and, jerking his thumb in the direction that Dalrymple had taken a minute or so before, asked,

‘Now, what do you think of him?’

‘And what,’ demanded Jonathan, cau-

tiously surveying his questioner, 'dost thou think of him thyself?'

Cain the Leg resumed his study of the harbour, and Jonathan, after lighting his pipe inside his sou'-wester, assisted him. When Cain the Leg again woke up, he had turned the matter over in his mind as carefully as he had the quid in his mouth.

'I think,' he said, looking steadily at Jonathan's changeless face, 'he's a mortal good han' at playin' *fodjeeaght*,* an' if we're to believe the haf o' what he says, there's gould on *cushags*† yonder, for sartin, sure' — 'yonder' being indicated by a wink across the sea.

'Ay, boy!'

'Ay, that I do,' said Cain the Leg, nodding. After another lengthy pause, he added, 'An' I think this, too. It's a deep

* Drawing the long bow.

† Yellow ragwort.

game he's playin', though he is so keerless like, an' if he don't min' what he's after, he'll be runnin' some o' the hooks into his own fingers. What do you say?'

'I say nothin',' replied Jonathan, who had a good market for cod at the barracks.

'That's not much, anyway.'

Jonathan smoked on for a while in silence, and then took the pipe out of his mouth to say,

'Thou must summer an' winter a stranger before thou canst know anything at all about him.'

Cain the Leg looked at him with some contempt. But, the Castle clock striking the hour, he said,

'I must take the road, though.' And so stumped on his way towards Claddagh House.

The distrust of Dalrymple, it thus

appeared, was not confined to his own circle of acquaintances ; it had reached a much lower stratum. Indeed, as we have already seen, it had penetrated even to the dog creation, Toby having very pronounced views on the subject, though it would be difficult to say by what sense he had acquired them.

Nevertheless, Dalrymple, who could be just as agreeable as he usually was disagreeable towards his own sex, had a way of inspiring confidence in those whom he wished to be favourably impressed. He had tried it with the Colquitts, and also with Ned ; in both cases with complete success. Perhaps it was in some measure due to the careless manner which Cain the Leg had noticed. It was hard to think of a man so obviously indolent and easy-going as one who would engage in the determined pursuit of any particular object.

When he trod on anyone's corns, it was generally ascribed to a lazy, selfish habit of lounging through life without regard to the feeling of others. This was true enough in most cases. But there was one case in which he was resolutely following a definite track, and here the prevalent idea helped to conceal his intentions.

As almost invariably happens to such men, his indifference to what others might feel or think led to trouble which might easily have been avoided. Dalrymple never made a greater mistake than he did on St. Stephen's Day when he offended Bobby Beg. The fruit of that sowing, though not very quick in ripening, lasted him a life-time.

CHAPTER XIII.

ROUGH WATER

ON St. Stephen's Day it was customary for parties of youths to go about singing, carrying tiny biers formed of interlacing boughs and twigs, and decorated ribbons, evergreens, and such flowers as were procurable. In the centre of each bier lay an unfortunate wren, sacrificed to an old custom supposed to have originated in a command given by the early Christian missionaries, the wren being called in Manx the *dreain*, or 'Druid's bird.' As

everyone who has read Grimm's tales knows, it is also the king of birds, a title perpetuated by its name in Latin, French, Dutch, and several other languages. Hence, doubtless, the pretence of vast exertion with which the biers were carried.

This custom, which still lingers in places, is one of the few that one would gladly see die out, for it involves cruelty to a bird whose sole cause of offence presumably is that it was the favourite of the Druids. It has been carried so far that wrens have become almost extinct in the island, and substitutes have generally to be found for them. Though a rat has been so honoured after its death, the usual victim is a poor little robin.

But on this particular St. Stephen's Day it was actually a wren that occupied the bier which Bobby Beg and a number of others carried round the town. They

arrived in front of the barracks shortly after the conclusion of parade. It was a fine cold morning, the ground as hard as iron, sprinkled with patches of hoar-frost, on which the sunlight fell and glittered. The sentry paced to and fro close to the railings before the building; just beyond stood Bobby Beg and his party. He looked exceedingly proud of himself; was he not performing for the benefit of the military, many of whose heads appeared at the upper windows to listen? He led the way into a song containing thirty-five verses, which the reader would not thank me for repeating. But here is one, the third, as a sample:

‘ We’ll hunt the wren, says Robin the Bobbin ;
We’ll hunt the wren, says Richard to Robin ;
We’ll hunt the wren, says Jackey the Land ;
We’ll hunt the wren, says everyone.’

The singing brought Dalrymple to his

window. He opened it, and, though the song was scarcely begun, threw out sixpence and said,

‘Now, be off!’

Bobby Beg looked hurt. However, he picked up the sixpence and determined to give this contemptuous officer full value for his money. Though the others showed a disposition to slink away, he stuck manfully to his text and sang on by himself.

‘Didn’t I tell you to be off!’ cried Dalrymple.

Bobby Beg gave him a look of deep reproach. He could no longer doubt that his singing was not appreciated. The only thing to be done was to give this unsympathetic stranger a dreain’s feather, and then to go. So, after plucking the unfortunate monarch, Bobby Beg politely doffed his singular hat, and, advancing to the win-

dow, offered Dalrymple the feather, which was considered a safeguard against shipwreck, witchcraft, and disaster generally.

‘Confound you, you idiot!’ cried Dalrymple, angrily; ‘what do you want? Here, sentry, what do you mean by letting this jabbering fool approach the window?’

The soldier promptly seized Bobby Beg by the arm, and pushed him away with a good deal of unnecessary violence. This was the signal for a general dispersion. A number of spectators who had gathered round withdrew to a discreet distance; the bearers of the bier retired in confusion, and Bobby Beg followed, gesticulating and muttering. If a chance of getting even with this high and mighty person should present itself, he would drop on it like a gannet upon a herring, and he would watch for such chance day

and night until he found it. A jabbering fool! Ay, well, he would see whether he could not make somebody else jabber too; and as to which was the bigger fool, that was a matter of opinion.

Then Bobby Beg recollected the sixpence. He fished it out of his pocket, and, returning a short distance, deliberately flung it at the window. It fell somewhere inside the railings. Before the spectators had recovered from their astonishment, he was walking off laughing scornfully. So Dalrymple made one determined enemy in Castletown.

The same afternoon he went out of his way to irritate Frank and widen the breach between him and Ned. The opportunity arose as follows:

Nessie, though feeling anything but well, had been visiting some of her humble

friends in Queen Street, and, when returning home, was attacked with dizziness. It was with the greatest difficulty that she managed to walk as far as the market-place, and here her strength deserted her. She stood quite still, trembling, not daring to take another step.

Diana, looking out of her window, saw her, and, struck by her evident feebleness and the exceeding pallor of her face, rose to go to her assistance. But the next moment she changed her mind, for three men were converging upon the spot from different directions, all walking at such a rapid pace that they might have been matched against one another. They were Frank Maddrell, Ned Christorey, and Fabian Dalrymple. Diana watched the race with breathless excitement; she stood at the window like a statue, except that

her eyes were bright with eagerness and her cheeks flushed with colour.

There were no townspeople about ; but a party of soldiers in couples, who had been engaged in fetching coals from the depot on the quay, had set down their great wooden baskets near the glacis, and were looking on with many a sly joke. One of them, the black sheep of the regiment, and, it must be said with regret, a clergyman's son, offered to lay two pots of beer to one on the lieutenant, but could find no takers.

Dalrymple certainly had the advantage not only in his long legs, but also in a good start. Ned, however, was running him close, slogging away at a steady, useful pace, with Toby trotting behind. And, if Frank had the longest distance to travel, he appeared to be moving the fastest. As the three advanced, walking like clock-

work, Diana plainly showed in which direction her sympathies lay. She made an impatient movement as if she would hurry Ned along, and, when she saw him suddenly stop, looked both indignant and dismayed. Then a little cry escaped her, for Frank was running. He arrived too late, however, Dalrymple having already reached Nessie's side, and insisted upon her taking his arm.

‘Allow me, Nessie,’ panted Frank.

‘Certainly not, sir,’ said Dalrymple, loftily, waving him back with his disengaged hand. ‘Don’t you see your wife is waiting for you?’

Frank made a dash forward, but stopped, quivering with passion which he could scarcely control. ‘You cad!’ escaped from between his clenched teeth.

‘Go to your friend there,’ said Dalrymple, looking back and nodding towards

Ned, who was standing out of earshot. 'He will teach you better manners.' Then he marched off with Nessie, who had no very clear idea of what was taking place, her poor head ached so.

Frank stood awhile staring after them, then, almost beside himself with rage, he rushed up to Ned.

'Look!' he cried, fiercely, seizing Ned's arm and pointing at the retreating couple, 'that's your doing. Yours—yes, yours, Ned Christorey. You pretended to love her, and you have delivered her up body and soul to that demon! Are you proud of your work?'

'Steady there, Frank,' said Ned, quietly. 'What have I done?'

'Great heavens, he asks what he has done! Look there; that's what you have done. Given her over to a life of misery. That's what you have done.'

‘ But how?’

‘ By your incredible folly.’

‘ Look here, Frank,’ said Ned, in the same quiet tones. ‘ I can stand a great deal from you, especially when you must be very much worried, but this is going too far. You give me no alternative, I’m sorry to say ; you compel me to leave you alone until you return to your senses. Come, Toby!’

Lingering a little in the hope that he might be called back, he walked away, and it was not until he was long out of sight and hearing that he quickened his pace. He went after Nessie and Dalrymple.

Not one of the details of this scene had been lost upon Diana. Though unable to hear the words spoken, she had seen every look and gesture, and they were full of painful significance, telling her far, far

more than she wished to know. If she had needed any clue to her real position, nothing could have been clearer than what she had just witnessed. What progress had she made in the affections of the man she loved, her husband? Had she made any progress? Not the least, so far as she could see. With a weary sigh, Diana sank upon the couch.

Meanwhile, Ned, anxious on Nessie's account, went to Claddagh House to inquire the nature of her illness, and offer any assistance in his power. He approached with more than usual awkwardness, blushing at the recollection of his last visit, when she had sent him from her for the second time. Dalrymple, in the coolest manner in the world, came to the door and invited him in: a most bare-faced thing to do, considering what had passed

between them. If anything could have opened Ned's eyes, surely that should. But he regarded it as merely a friendly act, though perhaps somewhat too familiar. When he learned that Nessie was suffering from nothing worse than a severe headache, he declined Dalrymple's invitation, and walked off to think matters over. Indeed, he was too much upset by his interview with Frank to be capable of conversation.

Nessie did not recover as quickly as might have been expected. She had to keep her room for several days, and, her system being much shaken by recent troubles, Dr. Mylworry thought it not impossible that she might be laid up for a week or two. Slight as was the additional expense this entailed upon the family, it nevertheless told its tale upon an ex-

chequer already sadly overburdened. At a council of war convened by Mona, it was reluctantly decided that some of their capital must be sacrificed to meet the bills which would be showered upon them at the commencement of the New Year. In other words, unless something should turn up—a conveniently vague expression which evaded the necessity of putting certain contingencies in a more definite form—starvation was merely a question of time.

What was the most likely something? Dalrymple had never been a more frequent visitor at the house than he was now. Almost the only visitor, he had things pretty nearly his own way. His object seemed clear; everybody said he was bent on marrying Nessie.

As if to give everybody the lie direct,

Dalrymple suddenly announced his intention of going on leave. What is more, he carried it out. He secured a berth on board the *Lord of the Isles*, one of three small steamers then plying between Douglas and Liverpool, and vanished, leaving his Castletown acquaintances in the greatest bewilderment.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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